

Stewkley Neighbourhood Plan Roads and Infrastructure Group

Final report to Steering Group – Final 26 June 2017

INTRODUCTION

The R&IG comprises three long-serving members of Stewkley Parish Council's Transport Subcommittee (SPCTS), which was formed to address issues identified in the 2010 Parish Plan. During the formulation of that Plan, about 60% of households responded to a questionnaire. Of those, 60% said the roads were too busy at peak times and more traffic-calming measures were required; 44% said they encountered problems with parked cars when driving. Since 2010, the subcommittee has installed MVAS (Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs) and set up a Community Speedwatch team. Many other initiatives stalled because of the cost of the preferred solutions or lack of commitment from Bucks County Council (CC) or Thames Valley Police (TVP) for various reasons.

The R&IG is chaired by Mr Keith Higgins, Chair of the SPCTS and a parish councillor for four years. Mr George Harper has been a member of the SPCTS since it began; he set up and now leads the Community Speedwatch team. Before his retirement he was Vice President and European Director for a Global Infrastructure Consultant. Mrs Rachael Webb, who was a Parish Councillor for 12 years, chaired the Parish Plan Steering Committee and set up the Transport Subcommittee. She has a Master's Degree in Environmental Policy from the Open University, which included a dissertation on Sustainable Development, is a former Chair of North Bucks Parishes Planning Consortium, and a current member of Aylesbury Vale Transport Users Group.

TOPICS

1. Current volume and speed of all traffic
2. Volume and speed of HGVs and agricultural vehicles
3. Residential parking
4. Impact on traffic / parking of new village developments
5. Impact on traffic of development outside of the village
6. Pedestrian, cyclist and horse-riders' safety
7. Identification of "Hot Spots" that demand particular attention
8. Desire and need for increased public transport

APPROACH

It was acknowledged at the outset that the impact of future development on Stewkley's roads, and possible solutions, could not be predicted in detail until at least possible sites and numbers were identified. The uncertainty is compounded by there being five roads in and out of the village, each leading to employment and education facilities, there being no way of predicting the direction of additional traffic flow from any new development.

Stewkley parish also provides through-routes to and from many other residential and employment centres, near and far, and the anticipated level of development in many areas will undoubtedly lead to increased but unquantifiable traffic levels.

It was therefore decided to focus on the current situation and identify solutions that are required now to improve the safety of drivers, cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians, and improve the quality of life for residents. These solutions would be pertinent wherever and whenever additional development occurs, which itself should be shaped by sound generic but adaptable traffic and parking-management principles.

To this end:

1. The previous work of the Traffic Subcommittee was reviewed in the light of the possibility of developer contributions and any change of policy at Bucks CC and TVP.
2. On the advice of AVDC, Neighbourhood Plans of some other communities were examined to decide what would be best-practice and most productive for Stewkley.
3. The results of Speedwatch sessions, from eight TVP-approved sites throughout the village over a four-year period, have been reviewed.
4. This and other data have been updated and expanded with the collection of data on the volume and speed of traffic, in both directions, at all the MVAS sites, namely: High Street North near Haywood Park, Bletchley Road, Soulbury Road, High Street South near the War Memorial, Wing Road and Dunton Road.
5. Discussions were held with two local companies, whose large vehicles regularly transit Stewkley, to ascertain their current and planned traffic management strategy and movements.
6. The likely impact of traffic to and from the new railway station at Winslow was investigated.
7. The village school was consulted about their School Travel Plan to confirm their current objectives and projects and ensure conformity.
8. Continuing discussions are taking place with Transport for Bucks and Thames Valley Police to ensure that proposed solutions would be feasible and supported at all levels.

IMPLICATIONS RE AVDC LOCAL PLAN – as above (i.e. we don't know)

CONSULTATIONS – people/organisations mentioned above and to be detailed below or in appendices

EXPERT ADVICE OBTAINED – as above

ISSUES - SUMMARY

1. Residents' dislike of current and anticipated volume, speed and noise of traffic for aesthetic, especially rural, and safety reasons
2. Particular dislike of large vehicles, including agricultural
3. Traffic calming often brings lots of unattractive street clutter and lighting
4. Residents wish to park outside their homes, sometimes against the guidance of the Highway Code
5. This brings them into conflict with other residents who consider this parking dangerous and inconsiderate
6. Safety and desirability of walking/cycling/horse-riding and therefore a healthy lifestyle is compromised
7. Particular hot spots include:
 - a. Dangerous parking and careless driving near the War Memorial
 - b. Severe congestion and single-carriageway availability High Street North near Chapel Square at school times
 - c. Parked cars from Sycamore Close around Cricketer's Farm Corner to the Village Shop
 - d. Speeding at all entrances to the village
 - e. Parked cars at top end of Dunton Road
 - f. Children crossing roads on the way to school, e.g. Soulbury Road.

ISSUES - DISCUSSION

The issues overlap, and discussion of one is often not possible without discussion of another, hence the nature of the discussion as follows:

Road Infrastructure and traffic volumes

The capacity of Stewkley's roads to handle greater volumes has changed little over the years due to its historic network, originally "designed" for horses and carts: single carriage highway, with little scope to widen or improve in other ways except by tinkering with the three main junctions. The NP questionnaire identified around 1,300* vehicles based in Stewkley, of which approximately 400* are regularly used to commute to work. Data from the MVAS radar confirm that most traffic is passing through, with an average of 5,700 vehicles logged incoming on weekdays and 5,950 outgoing**.

* Pro-rata from the 80% response

**Appendix 4

We do not have historic data to calculate traffic growth, but many residents bear witness to their impression that the roads are busier than ever. Looking forward, new housing developments will add to the volumes, with the direct consequential impact on the village varying according to the location of the development and the route taken to exit from/return to Stewkley. As a recent survey indicated, this is not always the nearest one, as destinations for employment, education or leisure are located in every direction.

As far as commercial vehicles are concerned, two of the larger locally based operators do not anticipate significant changes in traffic but, without a detailed traffic survey, we cannot quantify what percentage of total volume of this category they represent. An HGV ban or weight restriction would not be practicable or enforceable because many HGVs/Agriculturals are connected to local businesses where they have no option but to drive through or to the village and monitoring/enforcement would be problematic. At a county strategy level, Bucks CC has shown little enthusiasm for HGV limits, although the recent pressure from neighbouring counties might encourage a review of this approach.

As mentioned above, of equal significance for Stewkley will be the impact of planned residential and employment developments in the surrounding area along with the influence of planned transport projects, such as East West Rail, the East West Expressway, any Wing bypass, and even the completion of the A5-M1 Link. Any of these could increase the use of Stewkley as a rat-run.

One possible solution is a new road that bypasses the village, but given the epic struggle by Bucks CC for a Wing bypass (we understand that funding for a feasibility study is again being sought), and unless Stewkley's bypass could be considered part of a wider strategic project, it is doubtful this would be an agenda item in a realistic time frame, so it is reasonable not to pursue this option here.

Public Transport

A significant transport modal shift is required to tangibly reduce the number of cars in and through the village. Stewkley is, historically, poorly served by bus companies. The services* (appendix 1 for details of services) to all intents and purposes are geared towards the retired community, not workers, commuters, students or socialising teens. Since the retired community use their free bus passes, there is no possibility of these services becoming commercially viable.

Our recent investigations have revealed that at this time there do not appear to be any plans to provide additional bus links to the new Winslow railway station, only a car park owned by Bucks CC, which is already deemed inadequate for the forecast demand, and a cycle path from Buckingham. This replicates the problem experienced at Leighton Buzzard Station, and indeed most stations along the Euston line, where the parking situation is already critical.

Responses to the NP questionnaire suggested that the demand for buses could triple, but split over four main destinations and spread across a longer day, particularly earlier and later for commuters.

It is therefore highly doubtful that a commercial operation could be sustainable. In the absence of a frequent, reliable service to the main centres, it is also unlikely that many residents will do without their private cars for employment or leisure travel.

The required modal shift to decrease traffic volumes is therefore highly challenging to achieve. However, an improved bus service or cycling opportunities would be beneficial for more than just social aspects. Indeed, other towns or clusters of villages have successfully supported community bus operations and this possibility for Stewkley should not be excluded. Indeed over the span of the 20 year Neighbourhood Plan during which traffic volumes will inexorably increase, putting more strain on our community, it is crucial for Stewkley to play a full part in bringing targeted public transport services for our residents to link the village with their daily employment, leisure and social destinations.

Vehicle Speeds

Stewkley is approached on five main routes by relatively straight-though, undulating single carriageway roads with vehicles required to reduce speed from the national limit of 60 mph directly to 30 mph at the gateways to the village. Unlike many neighbouring villages, there is no 40 mph buffer zone to highlight the change from rural to residential, nor major gateway features. It is no surprise (but also no excuse) that many vehicles are still well over the speed limit as they enter and continue into Stewkley. Data from periodic Speedwatch operations, the MVAS and indeed Thames Valley Police camera enforcement* give concrete support to the conclusion that too many drivers are ignoring the limits, thereby increasing the risks of injury or damage to themselves or others on our narrow roads .

* Appendix 2 for data

Solutions under the broad description of “traffic calming” have been examined by Stewkley PC for decades. A major review was undertaken in 2000-2001 and a series of measures implemented in 2002, part-funded by a Bucks CC grant, but largely financed by a significant increase in the parish precept. The measures consisted of improvements to signage at village entry points by emphasising the start of the speed limit sections and the construction of build-outs in High St North and Soulbury Rd. Nothing was proposed for the War Memorial junction.

Traffic calming* was again considered in great detail during the research and follow-up to the 2010 Stewkley Parish Plan. Many ideas were proposed in response to residents’ comments, but few solutions could be implemented due to cost, disagreement from different sections of the community on the suitability of the proposals or the lack of supporting local/central government legislation.

*Appendix 3 Traffic Calming solutions

The prospect of increased traffic volumes from both village development and regional factors adds urgency to the existing need for improvements.

Schemes need to allow access for HGVs/Agricultural vehicles without exacerbating problems for residents, e.g. increasing noise from engines, brakes or body-work.

Parking

Concerns regarding the quantity and location of vehicles parked on the main routes through Stewkley have been repeatedly raised over the years and again in the more recent NP questionnaire. The NP questionnaire quantified the number of vehicles involved at nearly 180 vehicles routinely parked on-street, usually due to lack of suitable off-street parking spaces and the demand from

residents to park as closely to their front doors as possible for security/convenience reasons. Whilst many are outside properties in side streets, there are a significant number along the two stretches of the High St and a few along Soulbury Rd. The reason for such parking behaviour is clear: many of the older houses fronting the High St were not provided with sufficient parking spaces beside or behind their properties.

The consequence however is that some of these vehicles increase the risk of accidents or danger to passing traffic and pedestrians by being parked inconsiderately or close to junctions or bends, often against the guidance of the Highway Code. Whilst some official advice insists that parked vehicles act as an important element in slowing traffic, the perception in Stewkley is that traffic, predominantly from outside the village, takes little notice, and confrontations between on-coming vehicles is an everyday occurrence.

Parking restrictions which might improve some of the most obvious hot-spots are notoriously difficult to introduce (lengthy, expensive, bureaucratic procedure) and to enforce (low priority for the Police). Nor would yellow lines fit well with the historic character of the village.

None of this is unique to Stewkley, nor is the situation around the village primary school, St Michael's, which is located in the middle of the village behind Chapel Sq, where the dropping-off and pick-up times are characterised by long lines of parked vehicles around the square and High St North. Use of the Village Hall car park opposite has offered some relief but not enough. Initiatives by the School to encourage more walking to school or dropping off children at other more suitable spots, such as at the Rec Pavilion car park, have had limited success, even in favourable weather conditions.

Expansion of the school as a consequence of housing developments can only make the situation worse, with more parents wishing to drop their children off as close to the school gates as possible. There are few opportunities to improve access to the school by offering easier drop off areas nearby, and the possibility to install a new pedestrian access on High St North to reduce the numbers through Chapel Sq was deemed unsafe year ago due to increased dangers of drop offs there and consequent congestion. So the focus must be on finding alternative safe routes to the school for pedestrians from home or intermediate drop off points.

Footpaths and footways.

Although Stewkley is fortunate to have a wide network of footpaths leading out of the village across the surrounding countryside, there are few suitable paths or footways for wheelchair or pushchair users except along the main spine of the High St and Soulbury Rd. Whilst High St South and Soulbury Road have footways outside properties on both sides of the road, High St North is not so well provided. This adds to the risks for pedestrians, as does the history of speeding vehicles through the key junction around the War Memorial, where near-misses involving pedestrians are frighteningly frequent.

Measures to improve the safety of pedestrians along this principal access route are necessary now and will be even more so after any development in the south of Stewkley. A pedestrian crossing near the school in High St North could be a way to safeguard any policy change regarding School crossing patrol (Lollipop lady?) and would certainly make the current crossing safer. A second one in Soulbury Rd giving safe access to a suggested footpath through the Rec to Ivy Lane or the footpath beside the churchyard would be an extra encouragement for pedestrians from Dove St and beyond to avoid the High St and the War Memorial corner. This new "Rec" footpath would also make the Rec drop-off point significantly safer too.

The design layout of any new development should specifically seek to optimise and improve on the existing footpath network to provide pedestrians and wheelchair users with safe access around the village.

Traffic Management

Stewkley is characterised by its long narrow High St, reputedly the longest in England, and the buildings that straddle the High St within the Conservation Area. Therefore the management of traffic needs to be sensitive to this element regarding the selection of road signs and physical road calming measures to minimise the dangers to traffic and pedestrians alike.

The earlier limited measures dating back to 2001 made use of road markings to highlight dangerous or blind bends but, over time, these become worn and are not refreshed and lose their impact. Likewise, the few warnings signs for junctions and the school with its crossing point have erred on being minimalist and avoiding new posts and thus end up being less effective.

When it comes to parking on these main through roads, the options are even fewer. Yellow lines (and statutory pole-mounted notices with their implied enforcement demands) have been rightly avoided so far, but the possibility of white “advisory” lines, complementing current Access protection Markings (APM) for residents’ driveways seems to have been excluded by a Bucks CC policy interpretation. These advisory lines would find a more ready acceptance by residents to identify the “hot spots” where inconsiderate parking significantly increases the probability of risk of collision or confrontation. They might equally be useful in some areas to delineate acceptable parking spaces.

The introduction of a 20 mph speed limit down High St North, from just North of Cricketer’s Farm corner to south of the War Memorial on High St South, would respond to many residents’ vision of dealing with the speed and volume of traffic passing through the highest concentration of pedestrians and parked vehicles. Local authorities, including Bucks CC, have not shown a great deal of support for such a limit, but communities would perceive it otherwise, and its introduction should therefore be actively considered.

Stewkley has been using an MVAS device for more than three years to monitor traffic speeds and volumes and to remind drivers that they are exceeding the 30 mph limit on village roads. The current locations are primarily at the village entrances but, given the concerns for speeding within the village, wider use of the existing device or additional vehicle activated signs could be made, especially near to the danger spots, the War Memorial junction and the school (with or without a 20 mph limit).

VISION

Necessary and sustainable development facilitates:

- The enhancement of Stewkley’s rural and historic ambience
- A safe and more healthy community
- Conflict-free existence / cohesion

ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE POLICIES and RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposal:	Policy/Recommendation
Reduce average speeds of vehicles entering	<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of Section 106 or CIL funds to a village wide traffic calming

and transiting the village and reduce risk to residents, whether pedestrians or road users	<p>feasibility study, including: The potential for mini-roundabouts where speeding is a particular problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of advisory white lines in parking ‘hot spots’ where there is a risk or danger • 20 mph speed limits in high risk areas • Introduce a 40 mph buffer zone on the main approach routes <p>The proposal from the housing, planning, landscape and environment group to develop ‘hubs’ and ‘pause points’ would contribute towards the achievement of this aim</p>
Rigorously assess the width of access and visibility for exiting and oncoming traffic for all new developments	Policy: Minimum requirements for vehicle access for all new developments and modifications
Prohibit parking close to junctions and site entrances	Policy: Address the road safety concerns of parking too close to junctions and site entrances by setting minimum requirements for provision of parking spaces for all new developments and modifications.
Optimise and improve on the existing footpath network to provide pedestrians and wheelchair users with safe access around the village	Policy: Provide pedestrian and wheelchair users with safe access around the village by requiring new development design and planning statements to demonstrate how improved safe pedestrian and cycle access through the village will be provided
Pursue opportunities to develop improved public transport	Recommendation: Pursue opportunities to develop improved public transport by co-operation with other adjacent communities
Restrict the passage through Stewkley of HGVs of a certain weight or size, except for access	Recommendation: Initiate discussion with the County Council to restrict the passage through Stewkley of HGVs of a certain weight or size, except for access.

Appendix 1

Bus services

Route 153/154 Stewkley to Aylesbury Bus Stn

Single daily service on Wed & Friday allowing 2-3 hours at destination

Route 162 Stewkley to Leighton Buzzard & Bletchley Bus Stn

One daily service to Bletchley via LB on Mon, Wed, Thurs & Sat , with two return services from LB

Appendix 2

Speeding behaviour

Speedwatch 2015

936 speeders (>36mph) up to 59mph

MVAS 2015 (395,000 vehicles movements)

Overall, more than 16% were exceeding 40 mph and just above 1 % exceeding 50 mph.

Thames Valley Police Camera van (near Fountains High St North)

During 2015 there were 15 visits and 244 offences detected.

So far in 2016 there have been 12 visits and 236 offences detected. (as at October 2016)

“The speeds of vehicles are mainly between 35-38mph, there are quite a few in the 43-49mph area and the odd one or two doing 50mph.” TVP comment on 2015 results.

Appendix 3

Traffic Calming Solutions : non-exhaustive list of possibilities

Village gateways, road narrowings/build-outs, visual narrowing with coloured surfaces, rumble strips, 40 mph buffer zones

Mini roundabouts, speed humps, platforms, 20 mph zone from War Memorial to Cricketer’s Farm corner.

Reconfiguration of the War Memorial Bend

Reflective bollards around War Memorial bend.

Pedestrian crossing near school & in Soulbury Rd.

Fixed vehicle activated warning signs inside village

Flashing amber lights on school crossing signs

Appendix 4 Average Daily Traffic volumes (MVAS)

Location	Weekday		Weekend	
	Incoming	Outgoing	Incoming	outgoing
Dunton Rd	977	867	510	560
Soulbury Rd	968	1130	618	791
Wing Rd	1401	1170	1026	950
High St North*	1430	2030	1040	1477
Bletchley Rd*	933	750	706	750
Total	5709	5947	3900	4528
*some double-counting				
War Memorial / High St South	2300		1600	