



# Watlington Parish Council

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## **Appeal by Archstone Projects Ltd and Bloor Homes Ltd**

Reference: APP/Q3115/W/19/3222822

Application reference: P17/S3231/O: Land at Britwell Road, Watlington



### **Proof of Evidence – Watlington Parish Council**

#### **First Main Issue: The effect of the development on traffic movements and highway safety**

Document reference: 3222822 WPC PoE1

**Witness and advocate for Watlington Parish Council:** Councillor Andrew McAuley

September 2019



I am Andrew McAuley. I am a member of Watlington Parish Council (WPC) and chair the Council's Planning Committee. I am also a member of the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Advisory Board which the Parish Council formed to give advice on the delivery of the WNDP. I am acting at the Inquiry as an advocate on behalf of Watlington Parish Council as well as a witness.

I am supported at the Inquiry by Gill Bindoff who is chair of the Advisory Board and has led the development of the WNDP since 2015. Mrs Bindoff may also act as an advocate and witness on behalf of Watlington Parish Council.

The evidence provided to the Inquiry by the Parish Council is not expert evidence. This will be provided by South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. The WPC evidence is informed by local knowledge and experience.

Watlington Parish Council seeks to demonstrate that the Edge Road is strategic infrastructure which is needed to enable sites in Watlington and the neighbouring parish to be developed. The impact of this development, in combination with other development in the local area, will be harmful to Watlington unless the Edge Road is delivered as part of the strategic plan for growth which is at the heart of the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan [1].

The Appellants assert that:

- i) It is not necessary or reasonable for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to limit the number of dwellings occupied on the development site at Britwell Road (by use of a Grampian condition) until the land and funding for the Edge Road is secured via



planning obligations associated with all Edge Road related schemes and a contract let <sup>1</sup>.

- ii) In terms of the transport and air quality issues raised, we do not consider this is severe (in the case of transport) or unacceptable (in air quality terms), given the proposed mitigation <sup>2</sup>.
- iii) Any short-term harm is outweighed by the long term benefits of supporting the delivery of the Edge Road <sup>3</sup>.

Watlington Parish Council does not agree with this view.

The appendices to this document are referenced by footnotes on each page and provide copies of or extracts from other documents. The reference documents included in the separate documents file are listed in section 7 with the reference number by which they will be referenced included in the text in square brackets, for example [4] for the TPP Traffic Study 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Barton Wilmore Appeal Statement of Case paragraph 1.8

<sup>2</sup> Barton Wilmore Appeal Statement of Case paragraph 1.10

<sup>3</sup> Barton Wilmore Appeal Statement of Case paragraph 1.10



## **1. The strategic need for the Edge Road to meet planned development in Watlington and housing growth in the wider local area.**

1.1 Watlington is a small, historic, rural town with a population of approximately 2,700 people. The streets in the town centre are narrow and configured in a way that is unsuited to modern traffic. The central area is designated as an Air Quality Management Area <sup>1</sup> (AQMA) and a large Conservation Area <sup>2</sup> covers most of the town. Watlington is an environmentally sensitive area and there are complex issues to be addressed in order to ensure that the growth of the town is managed in a way that benefits the community rather than damages it.

1.2 The central crossroads in the town is an area where the needs of traffic, pedestrians and historic buildings conflict. Traffic dominates but is constrained by the pinch point at the central crossroads by the Grade 2\* C17 Town Hall. The carriageway from the fish and chip shop to the lighting shop is only 4m wide reducing traffic to a single lane. This is a key area for of traffic congestion. The carriageway at the pinch point on Couching Street to the south of the Town Hall is only 4.3m. wide and does not accommodate two-way traffic but this obstruction is often missed when the impact of traffic on the town is assessed. The Parish Council has installed bollards at key points on pavements around the town centre to protect pedestrians and evidence of damage to these illustrates very clearly how difficult it is to keep people safe when traffic dominates the space <sup>3</sup>.

1.3 Watlington is at the intersection of the B4009 and the B480. The B4009 is a main access route to the M40 Junction 6 approximately 5km to the north, while to the south it

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A: Map of Watlington Air Quality Management Area

<sup>2</sup> Appendix B: Map of Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

<sup>3</sup> Appendix C: Damage to bollards



connects with Benson, Wallingford and Didcot. The B480 connects to Oxford in the west through Cuxham and Chalgrove, and connects Nettlebed, Henley and Reading in the south-east direction. Traffic to and from all these destinations travel through the town and account for over 85% of the total <sup>1</sup>.

1.4 Watlington is within a 7.5t weight restriction zone which covers a large area <sup>2</sup>. Weight restriction limits are regularly disregarded by drivers and HDVs including large agricultural vehicles cause congestion which frequently results in gridlock <sup>3</sup>.

1.5 AADT figures recorded by Oxfordshire County Council south of M40 junction 6 have remained fairly constant over the last eight years:

Year	AADT value
2012	9,300
2013	9,500
2014	9,500
2015	9,500
2016	9,900
2017	10,661 (5 day figure) 9,758 (7 day figure)
2018	9673
2019 (January to April only)	9361

The approximate split in direction from the junction between Couching Street and Brook Street is 50% towards Benson, 30% towards Nettlebed and Henley and 20% towards Chalgrove and Oxford.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix D: Traffic survey data from Benson

<sup>2</sup> Appendix E: Weight restriction zone map

<sup>3</sup> Appendix FG: HDV reports and photographs



- 1.6 Pedestrians frequently experience the traffic in the town as oppressive and intimidating. The pavements are narrow and some sections around the central crossroads are less than 1m wide. There is very little space between the buildings and the passing traffic, especially for more vulnerable groups including parents with children and older people using mobility aids <sup>1</sup>.
- 1.7 The Watlington Traffic Study carried out by Transport Planning Practice (TPP) in 2014 [4] gives a detailed and very thorough description of the issues in Watlington and the regulatory context of traffic planning. The photographs in the document were nearly all taken on 18th September 2014 and typical of day to day life in the town.
- 1.8 Without any increase in traffic volume as a result of development, the existing traffic situation in Watlington is unsustainable. It impacts adversely on people's health, the environment, social sustainability and on opportunities for the town to expand as a local economic hub and service centre. (Watlington Parish Council's Proof of Evidence 2: Air Quality, details impacts on health).
- 1.9 The only effective solution to solving the traffic issues in the town is to reduce the volume and the only effective way to achieve this is by the delivery of the Edge Road.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix HI: Age concern survey



## **2. Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan**

- 2.1 The Watlington community strongly supported the Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP) [1] at the Referendum in June 2018 and were actively engaged in the way the Plan evolved. It was made by South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) in August 2018.
  
- 2.2 Over the period of the development of the Plan the number of new homes required by SODC rose from 79 to 238. The community is prepared to accept increased housing numbers in order to provide the Edge Road to serve housing development but also to take the majority of through traffic away from the town centre.
  
- 2.3 The adverse impact of traffic on the town has long been a concern of local residents. The WNDP provides an opportunity to finally resolve the issue.
  
- 2.4 The WNDP provides an integrated plan for the growth of Watlington (paragraphs 6.3 and 6.4) which combines new infrastructure with housing development. This scheme was considered by the Examiner of the WNDP to represent sustainable development and to provide robust evidence to support the merits and purpose of a proposed Edge Road [2].
  
- 2.5 Planning applications on sites allocated in the WNDP for housing, including the appeal site, allow for a total of 313 new homes. In addition to these applications within Watlington parish, there are planning applications on two sites in Pyrton parish along the eastern section of the Edge Road bordering with Watlington. The Pyrton applications are an outline application for 100 homes on site PYR2 (P16/S2576/O) and a full application on site PYR1 for 37 retirement homes and a 60 bed care home (P19/S2380/RM). SODC has passed a resolution to approve the application on PYR1



and an application for reserved matters has been submitted. In combination, all these proposed developments will provide 450 new homes in addition to the care home. This represents approximately 30% growth from the current size of Watlington.

- 2.6 This level of growth contributes to national and local housing needs but cannot be sustainable without the accompanying infrastructure being in place at the right time.
- 2.7 The impact of the proposed development on land at Britwell Road should be assessed in combination with other individual sites in the local area, not only because it is an integral part of the wider development scheme provided for in the WNDP but also because of its implications for the Watlington AQMA (in line with NPPF 180 and 181). WNDP Policy P2 (c) specifies that *'Proposals for development should demonstrate how they will minimise air pollution caused by vehicle emissions, particularly in the cumulative effect within the designated Air Quality Management Area arising from extra traffic generated by new development.'* This combined assessment has not been carried out.
- 2.8 Significant progress has been made towards the eventual delivery of the Edge Road but currently there is no certainty about the construction and timing and no assessment of the risks which may delay or prevent the full delivery.
- 2.9 The Appellants' Statement of Case says that there is 'reasonable certainty' that the Edge Road will be built in a 'timely manner' but this cannot be relied on at this stage. The Statement of Case also says that any short-term harm is outweighed by the long-term benefits of supporting the delivery of the Edge Road. There is no evidence to show when the Edge Road will be completed and in use. In view of the damaging impact of traffic which currently affects Watlington, WPC objects to any additional harm for any period, however short.



2.10 The Watlington NDP and the Pyrton NDP are not in agreement regarding the Edge Road. The Pyrton NDP designates the site PYR 2 off Pyrton Lane as a Local Gap which does not include the road. The Examiner of the Pyrton NDP [7] did not reach any conclusions about the Edge Road but said, in his report, that it is a significant rather than a fanciful possibility and that the NDP should not pre-empt matters by preventing (or rendering unnecessarily expensive) the construction of the road.



### **3. Impact of development without the Edge Road**

- 3.1 The impact of increasing traffic in Watlington is difficult to predict and to assess. There is very little consistency in the base data used by consultants, traffic volume figures differ and so do the hours of peak travel times. There is no agreement on the number of vehicle trips per household or the percentage of journeys which are likely to use the main route through the town centre. The Parish Council has made a comparison between the assumptions made in the traffic assessments for the development at Britwell Road, WNDP sites B and C and site PYR2 which demonstrates the different outcomes from use of the same basic data <sup>1</sup>.
- 3.2 Between 2014 and the present there have been many traffic surveys in Watlington in support of planning applications. The data analysis and predictions of future traffic movements usually takes no account of the actual situation 'on the ground'. The physical constraints at the town centre are noted, but are often underestimated and the pinch points in Couching Street (4.3m) and in Brook Street (4.65m) are not taken into account at all even though they have a very significant impact on traffic flow and pedestrian safety. The impact on the day to day experience of the people who live and work in the town is hardly ever referenced.
- 3.3 The latest assessment and modelling by Clarkebond for the Appellants (Transport Assessment Addendum 02) concludes that the major pinch point by the Town Hall is operating with significant reserve capacity and with acceptable levels of queuing and delay for all scenarios in the A.M. and P.M. peak periods and will continue to do so to

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix JK: Analysis of traffic assessments by WPC, Aug 2019



2024. The Parish Council does not agree, particularly as this is the area where air pollution is greatest.

- 3.4 New housing in and around Watlington will inevitably lead to an increase in traffic through the town. The SODC Housing Land Supply Statement <sup>1</sup> published in June 2019 shows the total number of units which have been permitted and are expected to be delivered between 2019 and 2024. In addition to the planned development in Watlington this includes new 822 homes in Benson, 320 in Chalgrove and 488 in Chinnor, which amounts to over 2,000 new homes in the local area. The calculation of daily vehicle trips per household varies but if a figure of 4 is used (which is low rather than average) there is likely to be an increase of at least 8,000 additional vehicle journeys in the Watlington area between the present and 2024. While obviously not all these trips will pass through the centre of Watlington, access to the M40 to the north and the proposed Science Vale developments to the south-west will unavoidably funnel a significant number of additional vehicles through the town.
- 3.5 Substantial development has also been permitted in settlements further from Watlington, including Wallingford and Henley, which is likely to be a source of additional traffic using Watlington as an access to the M40 and destinations eastwards.
- 3.6 In 2016 AECOM produced figures for traffic in the area likely to be affected by proposed development at Chalgrove Airfield [17]. The figures show the known 2016 figures as base data and the predicted increase to 2033. Traffic through Watlington, without the development at Chalgrove Airfield, was predicted to rise by over 30% in that period. What is also known is that housing development is likely to be 'front loaded' in the towns

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix L: SODC Housing Land Supply Annex A



and villages in South Oxfordshire so the increase is likely to be greater in the short term in contrast with the long term predicted increase.

- 3.7 It is not possible to make an accurate prediction of the number of vehicles which will travel through Watlington in 2024 or 2033 but the known level of development in the area indicates very clearly that there is likely to be a substantial increase.
- 3.8 The Parish Council considers that the harmful impact of existing traffic levels in the town is severe. Schemes to reduce this impact in the short term are unlikely to be effective when there will be such significant increases in the volume of traffic over the next five years from development in the local area.
- 3.9 Development in Watlington, including the development at Britwell Road, is not sustainable without the full delivery of the Edge Road. This is the reason why the Parish Council does not agree with the Appellants that the development can proceed without conditions which limit the housing numbers on the site until the Edge Road is fully in use.



#### **4. The impact of the development on Pyrton Lane**

- 4.1 Pyrton Lane is used as a rat run for traffic seeking a second route through Watlington avoiding congestion in the town centre. The lane is barely wide enough for two small cars to pass, and most traffic has to use the access roads to St Leonard's Close and the Pyrton Lane courtyards as passing places. The width of the carriageway from kerb to kerb varies from 3.9m to 4.2m.
- 4.2 The 'S' bends beyond the houses are another obstacle and there are further sections of the lane in the northwards direction which are narrow and limit the smooth flow of traffic.
- 4.3 Clarkebond on behalf of the Appellants (Transport Assessment Addendum 02) considers that Pyrton Lane has a free-flowing nature. The Parish Council does not agree with this judgement.
- 4.4 Pedestrians are at risk because there is no continuous footpath along the section of the lane where people live. Traffic speeds often appear too fast for the constraints of the road and pedestrians feel unsafe.
- 4.5 Without the Edge Road in full use, it is likely that more vehicles will use Pyrton Lane as a cut through, including some vehicles from the development at Britwell Road. The WNDP Policy P2 [1] expects proposals for development to demonstrate how the additional traffic generated can be accommodated in a satisfactory way in the highway network. Although the impact of additional traffic from the development on Pyrton Lane may be small, it cannot be considered to be 'satisfactory'.
- 4.6 OCC is already in discussions with residents and the Parish Council about traffic calming measures which could improve traffic conditions. Pyrton Lane is expected to be closed



to through traffic once the Edge Road is completed and in use and this is the only certain scheme to resolve this long standing and increasing problem.



## **5. Proposed traffic mitigation measures**

- 5.1 The Appellants agree that the Edge Road offers long term benefits to Watlington and that a delivery programme is not yet in place.
- 5.2 The findings of the latest transport assessment by Clarkebond for the Appellants (Addendum 02) are that the development, would have no adverse impact on Watlington. However, the assessment has not been done in combination with other individual developments in the local area. In line with the NPPF this should have been done in order to assess the combined impact on the Watlington AQMA.
- 5.3 Clarkebond considers that the operation of the junction of Couching Street and Brook Street is very close to capacity in 2018/2019 without the addition of any of the development traffic. Nevertheless, the impact on the junction of traffic from the development is not considered to have a material impact.
- 5.4 Mitigation measures are proposed, however, to reduce the impact of traffic at this junction and improve traffic flows through the town.
- 5.5 A microsimulation model has been used to provide an analysis of queuing at the junction and proposals have been put forward for a scheme to implement the removal of on-street parking along Couching Street and Shirburn Road.
- 5.6 A very similar proposal was made in 2014 and 2015 in a study for SODC carried out by Ricardo AEA/Ricardo Energy and Environment [12] & [13]. The proposal was investigated in 2017 on behalf of SODC by AECOM (Watlington Parking Study [14]) also using VISSIM technology. The study concluded that queuing at the central pinch point,



by the Town Hall, would remain comparable with or without parking in the short term but would result in major increases in queuing in both directions by 2033.

- 5.7 The Parish Council has consistently rejected the proposal to remove the parking spaces. The parking was specifically provided, with the agreement of OCC, in order to provide a safer environment for pedestrians by reducing traffic speed through the town. The safety audit provided by the Appellants demonstrates that the removal of the parking spaces is likely to increase the speed of traffic and proposes speed cushions to slow traffic down. Although the parking gives rise to some 'stop – start' flow patterns, it breaks up the blocks of traffic at peak times so that two-way traffic can proceed. The Parish Council carried out its own research into the probable outcome of removing the parking spaces and came to the same conclusion as AECOM <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix M: Watlington Parish Council, Traffic Modelling 2016



## 6. Conclusion and Summary

- 6.1 Watlington Parish Council does not agree that the impact on the town of the development at Britwell Road would be acceptable without the full delivery of the Edge Road. The part delivery of the Edge Road on the site would lead to an increase of traffic through the town which would add to existing problems which are severe. Although the delivery of the Edge Road will be effective mitigation in the future there is no certainty about the timing of its completion, and it cannot be relied upon to mitigate the impact of traffic from the development in the short term. Short term harm to Watlington is not acceptable.
- 6.2 The Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan provides an integrated development scheme for housing and essential highways infrastructure. The community accepted higher housing numbers than needed in order to achieve the Edge Road in order to reduce the volume of traffic using the route through the town centre.
- 6.3 The impact of traffic associated with the development should have been assessed in combination with traffic from other individual developments in the local area in line with NPPF 180 and 181 because the development would have an impact on an Air Quality Management Area. The impact of traffic is difficult to predict which is evidenced by the different conclusions drawn from the same base data by different transport consultants.
- 6.4 Traffic from a wide area uses the B4009 through Watlington as an access to the M40. Junction 6 is approximately 5km away. Through traffic amounts to 85% of the total. AADT figures show that approximately 9,500 vehicles come through the town every day. This will increase significantly as development which is already permitted in the local area comes forward. Congestion is a major problem, particularly at peak periods. Congestion is caused by the narrow roads and pinch points where two-way traffic is



restricted. The major pinch point is at the Town Hall and only allows one way traffic movement.

- 6.5 Traffic congestion causes air pollution in the town centre which is damaging to people's health. It also creates an intimidating environment and threatens pedestrians' safety. The impact of traffic also causes harm to the Conservation Area by damaging historic buildings, including the 2\* listed Town Hall. The area around the town centre should be enhanced to provide an attractive area which would benefit local businesses and encourage the development of the town as a local centre for the surrounding rural area.



## 7. Reference documents

The reference documents included in this binder are listed below together with the identifier by which they will be referenced is included in the text in square brackets, for example [4] for the TPP Traffic Study 2014.

<b>Reference Number</b>	<b>Title</b>
1	Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan
2	Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Examiner's Report
3	Watlington Neighbourhood development Plan Sustainability Appraisal and Environmental Report
4	Transport Planning Practice Watlington Traffic Study 2014
5	Mode Transport Planning Watlington Traffic Management Plan 2017
6	Watlington Conservation Area Character Study 2011
7	Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan Examiner's Report
8	SODC Air Quality Action Plan 2014
9	SODC Air Quality Annual Status Report 2017
10	SODC Air Quality Annual Status Report 2018
11	SODC Air Quality Annual Status Report 2019
12	South Oxfordshire Low Emission Strategy Study 2014
13	A Low Emission Strategy for South Oxfordshire 2015
14	Watlington Parking Study AECOM 2017
15	Assessment of the impact of the proposed Edge Road on the Watlington AQMA
16	Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy 2017
17	Chalgrove Airfield Briefing Pack AECOM 2017 (Extract)



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