

18. Witney

- 18.1 Witney is the largest town in West Oxfordshire. It is located 7 miles from Carterton, and 13.5 miles from Oxford, just off the A40 between Oxford and Cheltenham. It has good links by car and bus to other major towns, but has no rail station as it was dismantled by 1970.
- 18.2 Witney is a large town (population 25,000 in 2006) that has seen significant growth over the past 30 years under previous structure plan policy. Previous industries have made way for development, including Early's blanket factory, which has been demolished, and is the site of several new housing estates. Witney is still considered to be the most sustainable location for housing in the district in the current Draft Core Strategy for West Oxfordshire.

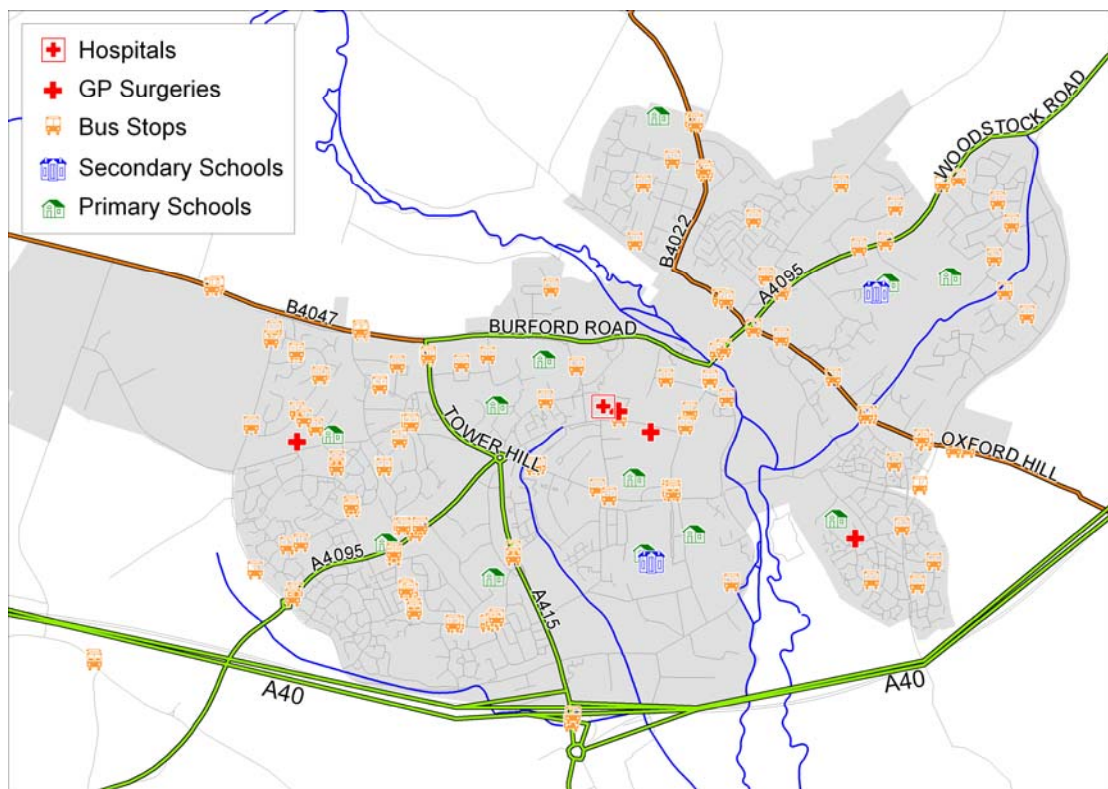


Figure 1: Plan of Town

Transport within Witney

- 18.3 There are two access points to town from the A40 via the A415 to the South and the B4022 to the South East. Additionally, the town can be accessed from Burford Road to the West, Hailey Road to the North and Woodstock Road to the North East. The A40 acts as a southern bypass for Witney.

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- 18.4 Witney benefits from a Premium Bus Route Service, the S1 & S2 which link Carterton, Witney, Eynsham, Botley and Oxford. There are a couple of local subsidised services too: the 213/214 serving Woodgreen, Madley Park & Cogges and the 215 serving the Smiths Estate, North West Witney and town centre. Bus services are provided to essential health centre destinations.
- 18.5 In terms of accessibility, schools are evenly distributed across Witney. They are accessible on foot being within no more than 15 to 20 minutes walk from the majority of households. With the exception of St Hugh of Lincoln Nursery School on Curbridge Road, the majority of pupils walk. Car is the second most popular mode of travel. Travel by bus is more common to the two secondary schools. Cycling to school is more popular on the southern edge of town reflecting more undulating topography to the north-west and east in particular.
- 18.6 There is a good range of public rights of way that connect Witney to the surrounding countryside. However the network is disjointed in many places where paths meet the road network. Selected improved management, road crossings and traffic-free links could help enable more people to access the countryside on foot, cycle or horseback.

Problems and Challenges

Walking

- 18.7 Despite an extensive pedestrian network, some of the most convenient routes for pedestrians and cyclists are not necessarily the most obvious and legibility, particularly through residential areas, can be a problem. This means that the town can be difficult to navigate on foot, especially for visitors. This can sometimes have the negative effect of making car travel more attractive, instead of encouraging trips on foot. This is a particular issue for Witney, as this could lead to shifting traffic on to what is already a congested network.
- 18.8 Within Witney high levels of traffic and on-street parking can deter pedestrians and cyclists. Therefore, improving existing walking and cycling facilities and signage is important, alongside promotion of existing and new routes. There is limited publicity of pedestrian (and cycling) routes from residential areas, to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre.
- 18.9 Permeability is further constrained by the River Windrush bisecting the town and the topography of certain areas, which may make walking less attractive.
- 18.10 In some instances Witney's urban foot and cycle paths do not link particularly well with rights of way and rural footpaths. Maintaining and improving links where public rights of way meet urban footways

and highways could help to enable more people to feel confident in using alternatives to the private car for local journeys and recreation.

- 18.11 Witney has a thriving town centre with its high street, shopping centres and variety of shops. Nonetheless, poor quality surfaces across town can be found. The Air Quality Management Area is also a less attractive area for pedestrians.

Cycling

- 18.12 Many of the problems for cyclists are similar to the challenges faced by pedestrians. There are some good cycle routes in existence but there are some gaps in infrastructure. There are inadequate cycle networks linking to nearby settlements. Cycle links between Witney and Carterton are non-existent and require consideration. Additionally, cyclists can use bridleways, restricted byways and byways (along with horse riders). These often do not connect safely with roads that are safe to use.

- 18.13 The topography in parts of Witney may deter walking and cycling but certainly more could be done to promote these for local trips.

Public Transport

- 18.14 Despite premium as well as a couple of local subsidised services linking Witney to major surrounding settlements, there is scope to increase the accessibility to public transport and development of new or existing routes that would make bus travel a more attractive transport choice from all parts of the town.
- 18.15 Journey time reliability between Oxford and Witney is very variable; this is caused by congestion approaching Oxford and within Witney itself. Poor bus shelters at bus stops do not make for an attractive waiting environment. Bus shelters are owned and maintained by Witney Town Council.
- 18.16 There are two free, long stay car parks in the town centre within close proximity to premium bus services going to Oxford. In practice, such arrangements may act as a Park & Ride facility for local residents using the bus to travel from Witney to the nearest train station and Oxford City centre. Those people who work in Oxford and live in Witney's core residential areas near the town centre tend to use bus services more than those living on the outskirts of town.
- 18.17 Witney does not have a rail station and there are no plans or commitments for any form of rail to extend to Witney. The nearest station is at Hanborough. There is a bus service (no. 242) connecting Witney town centre and Hanborough Rail station, which runs on an hourly basis, Monday to Friday. The journey takes approximately 20 minutes. On average, Hanborough station provides links to Oxford

and Worcester every one and a half hours with the journey to Oxford taking 15 minutes.

Behaviour Change

- 18.18 Behaviour change seeks to promote travel by healthy and sustainable modes and reduce trips by car for journey to employment, health, shopping and education. Where trips are made by car, other behaviour change initiatives such as car sharing can be deployed. Because of the congestion problems in Witney, and the scope for promoting a reduction in car use (predominantly for local trips), behavioural change has an integral role to play in achieving this.
- 18.19 Working with local major employers in Witney will be key to delivering behavioural change. Much can be learnt and adapted from travel behaviour and travel planning initiatives already developed at Witney schools, such as cycle training, promotion of walking from areas within 15 minutes from school and Walk 2 School Week.
- 18.20 To promote sustainable travel objectives, between 2006 and 2009, 374 cycle parking spaces were provided across schools in Witney.
- 18.21 Parents and school staff undertake walking audits to identify potential safety concerns along the routes and, subsequently, those are addressed through adequate infrastructure provision and school crossing patrols.
- 18.22 For example, for those who still choose to drive their pupils to school there is a Parking Programme in place at Our Lady of Lourdes RC Primary School to discourage dangerous parking outside the schools gates.

Roads and Traffic

- 18.23 Witney has access via the A40 into Oxford and westwards towards Burford and beyond. However, unreliable journey times towards Oxford in the AM Peak and out of Oxford in the PM Peak are daily occurrences. The Access to Oxford project will focus on the issues regarding the approaches in the Oxford vicinity from the west, for example at the Peartree Interchange. Although the County Council has not yet worked up detailed proposals for schemes to be delivered as part of Access to Oxford it is the intention that these improvements will help solve existing congestion problems and allow for future growth within Oxfordshire; it is imperative that Access to Oxford is delivered in order to accommodate this growth.
- 18.24 Bridge Street in the centre of Witney has an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared. Over 10,000 vehicles a day use Bridge Street as the only river crossing in the town, resulting in slow moving or stationary traffic. As a result annual means levels of nitrogen dioxide can exceed the national objective level in some parts of the

town. For that reason reducing congestion is a high priority and promoting travel by sustainable modes of transport will help to address this.

- 18.25 Flooding from the River Windrush affects central Witney around Bridge Street, (which is the town's only vehicular river crossing into the town) and, Mill Street, West End and new housing development Aquarius.
- 18.26 Oxfordshire County Council together with the District and Town Councils support the provision of a second river crossing in the town to reduce traffic levels and improve air quality by providing the Cogges Link Road from Witan Way to Oxford Hill. In addition to delivery of the Cogges Link Road, highway infrastructure inevitably requires further investigation, including schemes such as West End Link Road 2. A new junction on the A40 at Downs Road will be facilitated by development at North Curbridge, the preferred direction of further growth for the town. All have the potential to improve the overall accessibility and relieve congestion hot spots in the town. In conjunction, it is important to encourage alternative modes of transport in and around Witney as set out elsewhere in this strategy. West Oxfordshire District Council operates a free, time-limited parking policy, meaning that the town centre and other key destinations are very accessible by car.

Transport Strategy

- 18.27 The town strategy aims to deliver transport improvements to Witney with a focus on walking, cycling, bus service improvements and reducing congestion around the town and use of low emission vehicles as they become available. This Strategy supersedes the Witney Integrated Transport & Land Use Study (2003).
- 18.28 The strategy will look at how to initiate and influence travel behaviour in particular by encouraging people to make fewer trips by car and replacing these with trips made by foot, bike or bus. Promotion of sustainable travel also brings about wider benefits, such as healthy lifestyles, improved quality of life and can have both local economic and environmental benefits. Improvements to cycling and walking networks, and better bus services will be examined in conjunction with road improvements and traffic management schemes will also be looked at.

Walking and Pedestrian Environment

Improve facilities for pedestrians, including disabled people, across Witney. Schemes to improve links between employment and residential areas to key services and destinations such as the town centre, by foot, will be delivered.

Work with West Oxfordshire District Council and developers to ensure new developments are designed to promote permeability on foot both within the site and to link with the existing settlement.

Ensure urban footways join up with rights of way and rural foot paths.

18.29 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

- * Conducting an audit of current footways. The audit will identify schemes to improve legibility, way finding and permeability by creating formal walking routes to key facilities from residential areas, and between key facilities by providing signage and improved crossing points. It will also identify where footways can be improved through widening, providing dropped kerbs, and new or improved crossing points. This will help build up a work programme to deliver these improvements where they are most needed.
- * Improving connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban footways meet rural rights of way through new footpaths and signage to provide footpaths throughout the town and into the countryside.
- * Supporting the redevelopment of the town centre – Marriott's Close and Woolgate Centres in particular, to provide excellent access to facilities for pedestrians, improved surfaces and pedestrian crossings. This will include provision of a pedestrian crossing on Welch Way opposite the Marriott's Walk shopping centre
- * Publicising and promoting walking routes along and across the River Windrush from residential areas to key services and facilities by producing, maps, literature, and route planners, both in written print and on the internet.

Cycling

Improve facilities for cyclists and develop schemes which will provide a high quality cycle network. Measures will involve the provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/cycle paths, advanced stops lines, and cycle parking where appropriate, with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations.

Work with West Oxfordshire District Council and developers to ensure new developments are designed to promote permeability by bike both within the site and to link with the existing settlement.

18.30 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

- * Undertaking an audit of current cycle provision. The audit will identify schemes to enhance facilities for cyclists, including the provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/cycle paths, advanced stops lines, and cycle parking where appropriate, with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations. This will include investigation of routes such as cycle routes along Tower Hill
- * Delivery of Woodgreen pedestrian and cycle route, linking Newland via the primary and secondary schools on Madley Park, onto Woodstock Road.
- * Joining up the riding network across the wider area using public rights of way so that routes for commuting and recreation are improved.
- * Publicising and promoting cycle routes by producing, in conjunction with information on walking, maps, literature and route planners, both in written print and on the internet.
- * Working with West Oxfordshire District Council and Witney Bicycle Users Group to establish a better co-ordinated network for cyclists.

Buses

Work with the Town Council to improve the bus stop environment and appearance in and around Witney through investment in appropriate infrastructure, to ensure the provision of good quality and informative bus information at bus stops and local centres.

Ensure that new developments are located and designed to encourage the use of the bus, with particular attention to minimising walking distances to bus stops on the strategic inter-urban routes. Contributions for new bus stops and associated infrastructure to serve new developments will be sought.

Support measures which will reduce congestion around the Bridge Street junction to enable bus services to operate a reliable service and journey time.

Work with the bus companies to maintain and enhance the current premium bus services to Oxford.

- 18.31 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:
- * Creating good walking and cycling routes to existing bus stops, including appropriate crossing facilities.
 - * Providing cycle stands at bus stops where physically possible, at key locations.
 - * Encouraging the use of the bus by improving marketing and by providing passenger information through on street equipment, the internet and mobile phones.
 - * Working with Witney Town Council to replace poor bus shelters at stops, such as on Newland and the Corn Exchange.
 - * Investigating further the remote Park & Ride (P&R) concept at Eynsham, as a P&R for both Oxford and Witney.
 - * Improve the accessibility of the bus stops on Corn Street and Bridge Street to enable better access onto/off of the bus by creating small build-outs at each problem stop.
 - * Developing new or existing bus routes to make bus travel a more attractive transport choice from all parts of the town, including major employment areas such as to the west off of Downs Road.
 - * Working with local bus companies, developers and other partners to
 - * improve the frequency and attractiveness of the two Premium Routes to Oxford, thus increasing patronage.

- * Working with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve and develop bus services on certain other routes especially on the town periphery and towards Hanborough rail station.

Rail

Promote trips by bus to Hanborough Station, as the nearest rail station to Witney.

Encourage sustainable trips to Oxford Rail Station to connect to the wider rail network.

18.32 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

- * Investigating the demand for a Railbus link to Hanborough from the main residential areas of Witney (such as Deer Park, Cogges and Madley Park).
- * Investigating increasing the frequency of the 242 service.

Behavioural Change

Increase the awareness of health benefits and quality of life by enhancing the natural and built environment of the town through reducing congestion and improving air quality.

18.33 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

- * Identifying employers with high trip rates by car and contributing to traffic in the area and then work with those employers to produce and enforce a workplace travel plan. The plan should particularly focus on reducing car use by initiating and exploring car-share schemes, working at home policies and promoting walking and cycling by exploring the provision of facilities such as cycle parking or changing facilities.
- * Continuing to work with Witney schools, targeting and prioritising those which contribute the greatest traffic in the area. (These have been identified in the South West parts of town). Update the existing School Travel Plans and work with the school to ensure actions are carried through. Explore current transport and travel opportunities and concerns for students travelling to school with a focus on reducing car use,

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- increasing road safety education, training and publicity including cycle training.
 - * Advising on the development of travel plans and travel behaviour initiatives for new development sites to promote sustainable travel habits from the outset for new residents.
 - * Exploring the potential for car clubs in the Witney area.
 - * Promoting car sharing in the Witney area through oxfordshirecarshare.com.

Highway Infrastructure and Demand Management

Promote travel behaviour change to encourage people to make fewer trips by car, and to use more efficient and lower emission vehicles as they become available.

To make best use of existing road space through careful planning, working with partners and utilisation of technology.

18.34 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

- * Delivering the Cogges Link Road.
- * Working with West Oxfordshire District Council and developers to deliver an all movement junction on the A40 at Downs Road.
- * Working with West Oxfordshire District Council and developers to investigate delivery of West End Link 2.
- * Working with developers to secure delivery of other highway infrastructure, such as signal and junction improvements, road safety measures to mitigate the impact of further development and address network congestion concerns.
- * Mitigating the congestion through conducting feasibility studies to explore schemes to encourage greater use of walking, cycling or public transport for all or part of the journey, to complement highway schemes which address the network challenges set out.
- * Improving directional signing around the town, especially town centre signing, to ensure messages are clear, necessary and avoiding clutter of signage.

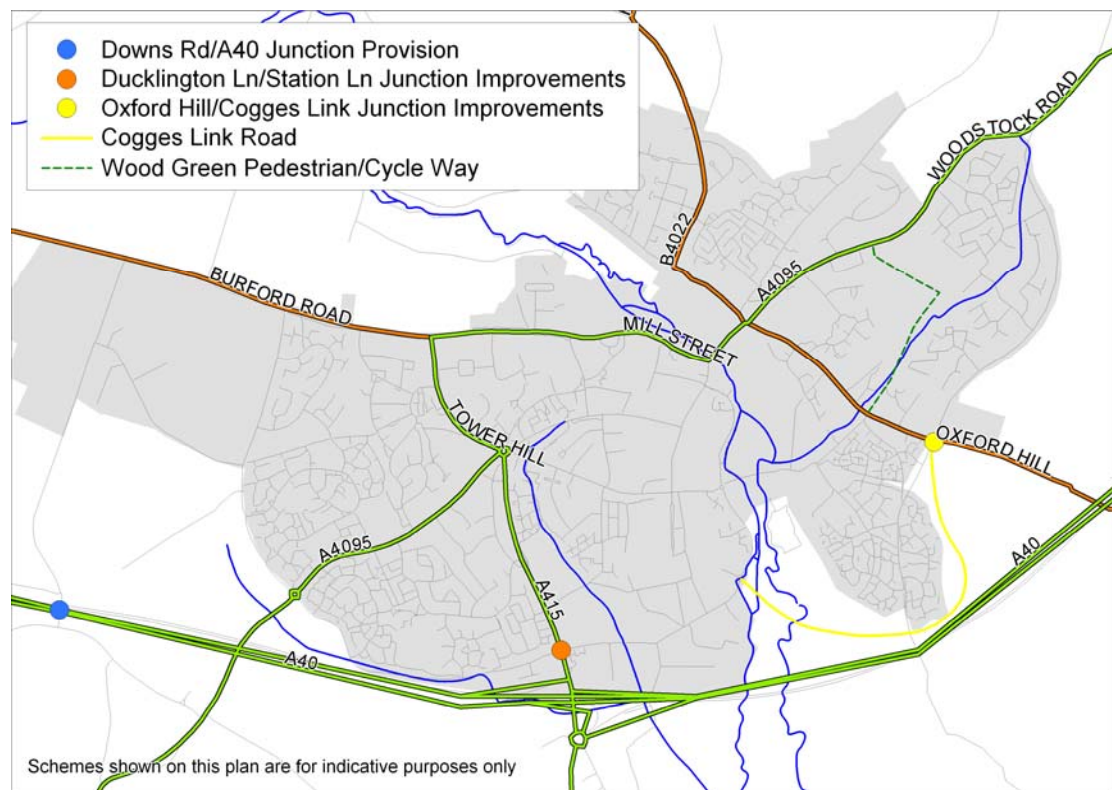


Figure 2: Witney Transport Infrastructure Schemes