

A report for Woodstock Town Council concerning the Safety of Pedestrians and Cyclists on the A44 in Old Woodstock

Old Woodstock has almost no community facilities. No school. No church. No pub (except for the Black Prince on the very edge of the community). It has no shops and no community hall. It has a highly valued children's play area and good bus services and that is all.

As a result it relies upon access to the schools in Shipton Road, and the library, shops, health centre, pharmacy, post office, cash-points, town hall, community centre, dentists and opticians in the town centre. That's fine. Most Old Woodstock residents want to feel part of the wider Woodstock community.

What Old Woodstock residents object to, is having to run the gauntlet of walking on narrow pavements in immediate proximity to 44 tonne HGVs thundering along the A44.

The imminent development of 120 homes at Hill Rise and the rapid expansion of Chipping Norton with up to a 1800 homes will add to traffic on the A44 and cause further intimidation and anxiety to pedestrians and cyclists. In places the pavements are barely 0.7 m (2' 3") wide and the adjacent carriageway is not wide enough for two HGVs to pass. This is not an occasional problem. The A44 carries between 14,000 and 16,000 vehicles per day, some 500 to 800 of which are HGVs. The accident record is mercifully good but the social and environmental impact on vulnerable road users (pedestrians, children, the mobility impaired and cyclists) is considerable.

The present studies being carried out by Community First Oxfordshire, in the light of the imminent development of new homes in the town, are to be welcomed in giving focus to the issues. But we all know that S106 funding is not limitless and that some schemes on the town's wish list may go unmet.

What the residents of Old Woodstock wish to underscore is that the problems of the A44 have not come about as a result of the Local Plan. If the Local Plan were abandoned tomorrow, parents walking their children to school in the morning peak hour, or residents with mobility impairments using buggies or wheelchairs to reach the Post Office or Library, would still face the stress and anxiety of sharing space with HGVs and a constant stream of vehicles, often exceeding the speed limit. Levels of air pollution are presently under investigation but almost certainly the levels of NO₂ and particulates will be shown to be unacceptably high.

These matters have been raised on numerous occasions with the police, with Cllr Ian Hudspeth and with Robert Courts MP, so far to no avail.

There is no engineering solution to the A44 itself. Its designation as a primary route precludes weight limits, and the proximity of roadside properties does not allow for pavement widening.

The solution, therefore must lie in the provision of an alternative, off-line cycle/footway and further speed limits and pedestrian crossing points on the main road.

We expect help from the S106 settlement in the Local Plan but we equally demand a response from the Highway Authority (OCC) in the light of the fact that the problems have been on-going for decades, that they pre-date the Local Plan, and that they demand an urgent response. Furthermore, these demands closely match the policy aspirations of Oxfordshire County Council as set out in its Local Transport Plan:-

Policy 03 Oxfordshire County Council will support measures and innovation that make more efficient use of transport network capacity by reducing the proportion of single occupancy car journeys and encouraging a greater proportion of journeys to be made on foot, by bicycle, and/or by public transport.

Policy 17 Oxfordshire County Council will seek to ensure through cooperation with the districts and city councils, that the location of development makes the best use of existing and planned infrastructure, provides new or improved infrastructure and reduces the need to travel and supports walking, cycling and public transport.

Policy 19 Oxfordshire County Council will encourage the use of modes of travel associated with healthy and active lifestyles.

Policy 20 Oxfordshire County Council will carry out targeted safety improvements on walking and cycling routes to school, to encourage active travel and reduce pressure on school bus transport.

Policy 34 Oxfordshire County Council will require the layout and design of new developments to proactively encourage walking and cycling, especially for local trips, and allow developments to be served by frequent, reliable and efficient public transport. To do this, we will [inter alia] ensure that developers promote and enable cycling and walking for journeys

We hope therefore that Woodstock Town Council will support Peter Jay's motion concerning the A44 through Woodstock and, in due course, the provision of alternative traffic free pedestrian/cycle routes to the schools and the town centre.

In summary, mitigating measures may also include:-

1. A 20 mph speed limit throughout the built up town area from Caroline Court to Hill Rise.
2. An additional signal controlled pedestrian crossing at Hill Rise and the conversion of the present Belisha Beacon crossing in the Causeway to a signal controlled crossing.

3. Improvements to the existing cycleways on A44 from Bladon Roundabout to Bladon Chain and from Hill Rise to Judds Garage (B4437 junction)
4. Improvements to footway (pavement) surfacings on the A44 at strategic points between the town centre and Hill Rise.
5. New independent, traffic free, off-line pedestrian/cycleways between Old Woodstock and the town centre and between Old Woodstock and routes to school.
6. An extension to the 30 mph limit south of the town between Bladon Roundabout and the Cowyards, and north of the town for a distance of at least 400 yards north of the present terminal point at Hill Rise.

Report prepared by Colin Carritt with additional data from Jane Ma. June 2019