

Harwell Parish Council

Comments on SCOTS report

Harwell Parish Council

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Harwell,
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Mrs Jacqui Cox
Principal Transport Planner
Oxfordshire Country Council
Speedwell House
Oxford OX1 1NE

Dear Jacqui

We had the opportunity to meet last month at the exhibition of the Vale plans in Harwell Village Hall.

We have already submitted our responses to the Vale LDF Core Strategies Preferred Options. These comments included detailed feedback on the traffic issues. Please ask if you would like a copy of our comments, if you have not already seen them. Alternatively you can find them on our website.

However, we now include essentially the same comments as part of our formal feedback to you on the SCOTS report. We also include comments on the Public Transport Strategy.

Once you have had an opportunity to absorb all the feedback from your consultation period we would like to request a meeting to review options and hope that we can find a better solution for the future which meets the needs of the county and which protects the village identity of Harwell.

Yours sincerely

David Marsh
Chairman
Harwell Parish Council

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Introduction

We have concerns over Sections 4 and 5, but will comment on Section 5 first, because the comment is shorter, and then follow with our substantive comments on section 4, the Highway Strategy.

Section 5 Public Transport Strategy

We object strongly to the whole emphasis of this section, looking to develop public transport along a Wantage/Grove – Didcot corridor, because it overlooks entirely the need for public transport between the employment centre at Harwell (forecast of up to 12,000 jobs) and the new housing proposed west of Didcot. The houses are justified by the jobs, and the jobs are justified by the houses, and there is NO strategy in the SCOTS report to join the two together.

Nor does the report look at the need for public transport from these new jobs, and these new houses, northbound to Oxford.

Section 5.5, Recent Developments, makes no mention of the existing hourly service between Harwell (Campus and Village) and Oxford City Centre. If the demand is there now, in 2009, for that service, then it will only grow in the timescale of this report, and not disappear.

Hence we object strongly to Figures 6 and 7 (Final report between pages 53 and 54) showing Harwell Village on a village link with services at 120 minute frequency, off-peak only.

Section 4 Highway Strategy

The report defines a Harwell by-pass connecting the A4130 to the A417. This in itself is **insufficient** and **unacceptable** to us, because of the consequent increase in traffic on the A417 Reading Road through Harwell Village.

There is an option of an A417 link to Chilton (via Hagbourne Hill). However, the report (4.6.1) opts for a Rowstock by-pass in preference to the Featherbed Lane and the Chilton Link improvements because of the greater benefits brought to the Rowstock junction.

We note that the modelling looked at traffic levels in Harwell in Grove Road, and at Drewits Corner, and did not measure the impact in the village of traffic on the A417 Reading Road.

We have identified other options for connecting the defined Harwell by-pass to the employment source at Harwell Innovation Centre, and southbound, to the A34. Additionally we have identified options for an alternative by-pass route north of Harwell Village.

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We request that all options are (re)modelled. This modelling must include traffic levels on the A417 in Harwell Village, in addition to the Grove Road figures used at the moment.

If modelling has to be limited, we request that consideration is given to our preferred options, which are:

- A Harwell North Road, or
- Link from the A417 south to the Harwell Innovation Centre

A map of the options follows. Notes and comments are:

Harwell By-pass A4130 to A417 (blue)

This is defined in the SCOTS report. The other options are extensions to this.

Harwell North Road, linking to the SCOTS Harwell by-pass (green)

This is our preferred route to bring traffic direct from Great Western Park and the Didcot west development onto the A4130. The route shown on the map is indicative only, and there is flexibility for where it crosses the A34, and where it joins to other roads at its east and west ends.

Although a new/upgraded bridge will be required, it (and other roads) will be shorter than any of the southern extension routes. So it may well be the cheaper option. We urge that it is properly costed and not dismissed as “too expensive because it requires a bridge”.

The route on the map implies a new bridge over the A34, but we would be happy if a route could be found utilising the existing Cow Lane bridge.

Alternatively the route could start from the existing bridge where the B4493 crosses the A34. Like the “Big” Rowstock bypass, this comes very close to existing houses in the village, and so should only be considered if the other north road, or the southern A417 extension to HIC are not viable. It would also need to avoid the recently installed water main.

At the east end it would connect to the Harwell by-pass, which in turn will be shorter because it connects only to the proposed southern perimeter road (if required), and not to the A417.

This route needs early planning to ensure that it is integrated into the road plans for Great Western Park.

Careful route planning is also needed to minimise the impact on existing dwellings in the B4493 Harwell to Didcot road. The advantage of this North route is that the new road need not follow the A34 and could join the B4493 further east, nearer to Didcot without destroying any existing housing.

The Rowstock junction and/or Featherbed Lane would still need upgrading to resolve the North/South v East/West rush hour traffic conflicts.

A417 to Harwell Innovation Centre (HIC) extension (orange)

This is our preferred southern extension. We recommend that it should follow the line of the A34 for as long as possible to minimise the impact on the AONB.

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Routes which we do not support

Possible A417 Chilton extension via Hagbourne Hill (purple)

Also defined in SCOTS report. We share the anticipated concern from Chilton Village that this route passes too many entrances/exits from Chilton Village and other junctions on either side of the A34, and are not in favour of it.

We understand from the exhibition on March 13, that the route joining the existing road (shown in purple on the map) has been rejected partly because the road would be too steep. The new route under consideration follows closer to the A34, straight up to the reservoir. We are not convinced that this would not also be too steep. However, it would still follow the same route through Chilton as shown, and hence the concerns remain.

“Big” Rowstock by-pass (red)

We recognise that this route might find favour with other local councils. However, we feel it passes too close to houses on the southern edge of the village and would have a major impact on the open area south of the village, an AONB much used by residents for walking. This aspect is important because of the potential loss of walking paths to Great Western Park and the Didcot west development, and the inaccessibility of the orchard land north of the village.

Note that this could also be called the “Bag Tree Route” because it would pass over the site of the “Bag Tree” which was famous to Harwell residents for hundreds of years until it fell down in 1975.

Map of transport options for modelling and inclusion in the SCOTS process.



Key

Blue: Harwell By-pass A4130 to A417 as defined in the Core Strategy and the SCOTS report

Preferred routes

Green: Harwell North Road, linking to the SCOTS Harwell by-pass

Orange: Southern Extension. A417 to Harwell Innovation Centre (HIC)

Routes not supported

Purple: Possible A417 Chilton extension via Hagbourne Hill

Red: "Big" Rowstock by-pass