

TRANSPORT POLICY

The A 37 is a major route that bisects the Village. It is beyond this Plan to address the traffic problems arising but there are some aspects which are relevant.

We sought an overview of the Transport and Planning Issues pertaining to Whitchurch Village and this is delivered by David Worskett FRSA FCIHT. This report highlights the shortcomings of the A37 to cope with substantial traffic increase. Upgrading the A37 **to trunk** road status to qualify it as a **strategic** route must be supported by firm evidence rather than vague assertions.

The traffic use of the A37 needs to be fully assessed by carrying out a fully comprehensive “Origins and Destination and purpose of heavy freight traffic” data survey. Such a survey would reveal how best to address the A37 corridor and future developments within this corridor.

The present traffic flows through the Village are clearly illustrated in the accompanying photographic evidence.

This succinct and comprehensive report highlights the need for the following points.

- 1.1. **Pollution.** In order to reduce the known level below the DEFRA Nitrous Oxide limit of 40 microns per cubic metre the expansion of the monitoring equipment be expanded to cover all routes with access to the cross roads and provide detailed feedback on the key times of maximum pollution.
- 1.2. **Safe Pedestrian Routes.** Existing footways in many locations fail minimum standards of width. Any development must fund by agreement, off site works to achieve minimum standards within 1 kilometre of the development site.
- 1.3. **On Site Parking.** Any development shall plan for an extra 50% of visitor parking above minimum parking needs to allow for greater Village parking controls.
- 1.4. **Roundabout Access to the A37.** Any new development in excess of 200 houses shall provide for S106 funding for a new roundabout on the A37 and enhanced junction design at the Maes Knoll Pub junction.
- 1.5. **Protection of Local Roads** All new development shall avoid diversion onto existing local roads, rat runs that avoid the main A37 route and protection of rural roads.
- 1.6. **Development requires adequate infrastructure to access employment.**







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Mrs Jill Britten
Paul May Esq.
Whitchurch Village Neighbourhood Plan Committee

11 July 2017

Dear Jill and Paul,

You asked me, in October 2016, for an “expert opinion” on the traffic problems faced by Whitchurch Village, both in the context of their developing Neighbourhood Plan and in relation to the work then being undertaken on a Joint Transport Strategy to support the Joint Spatial Strategy being developed across the region.

I was very happy to provide such an Opinion, on an entirely “pro bono” basis, and I now re-attach it, unchanged. For the avoidance of doubt I should also make clear that it is wholly independent of any other organisation and the views expressed in it are entirely my own.

You have also asked me briefly to summarise my credentials for offering this “expert opinion”.

I am now semi-retired. At an earlier stage in my career I was a Civil Servant in the then Department of Transport, where I worked on general transport policy; road planning; public transport policy; local traffic and traffic calming legislation and in my final role was the Assistant Secretary (Director) with overall responsibility for national road safety policy.

Subsequently I spent ten years as the Corporate and Public Affairs Director of the Royal Automobile Club and RAC Motoring Services, with a deep involvement in highways, traffic, safety and environmental issues. I was the founding Director of the (then) RAC Foundation for Motoring and the Environment and a non-executive Director of RoSPA and of the British Roads Federation.

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In the latter stages of my career I moved into the field of healthcare but remained in touch with the transport sector. I remain a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Worskett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

David Worskett. MA (Oxon), FRSA, FCIHT

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Whitchurch Village – Transport and Planning issues

You asked for my expert opinion on a number of related transport and planning issues that have potentially major implications for Whitchurch village. This note summarises what I suggested at our meeting on 12 October.

1. Draft Neighbourhood Plan

As you recognise, the Neighbourhood Plan cannot properly address the major traffic problems created by the heavily congested A37 that passes through the village. These are outside the scope of Neighbourhood Planning. However, from a transport planning point of view I think there are a number of aspects and possible policies that could perhaps be included and would relate to those problems indirectly. For example:

- The need to keep air pollution levels below legal maxima and to take this into account in appraising development options.
- The need to maintain recommended standards in respect of matters such as footways, drive access, parking provision, new highway junctions.
- the need to provide adequate and safe facilities for pedestrians and cyclists
- The need to avoid diversion onto and excessive use of local roads and country lanes that might arise from new development.

2. The case against dispersed development

This seems to me to be the huge flaw at the heart of how the Joint Spatial Plan is developing. Any major development – say in excess of a few hundred houses – down the A37 corridor (and indeed other corridors serving Bristol) needs to be dependent on absolute certainty in respect of three things:

- The physical/geographical/land use possibility of inserting adequate new transport infrastructure to link the developments to Bristol, bearing in mind that the primary purpose of new housing development is to serve the Bristol housing market and the vast majority of traffic generated will be related to employment and business in Bristol itself.

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- An absolute “upfront” guarantee that the full investment funding is available to provide that new infrastructure. Vague assertions and reliance on non-guaranteed funds from various sources are not good enough. The history of UK planning decisions is littered with wishful thinking about the provision of vital infrastructure which all too often simply never materialises. Transport planners know that: they are too often over-ruled by others, sometimes for political reasons.
- A robust economic assessment of the financial viability of proposed new transport links. Generally it is the case that quite substantial passenger flows are needed to make good quality public transport links economically and commercially viable. If the financial operating model (which will normally include servicing the original investment) does not stack up, then the Council(s) will either be faced with the need for ongoing, long-term subsidy or the inevitable failure of the vital public transport services, forcing people back into their cars and onto already over-congested, polluting and unsafe roads.

As far as I can see, the necessary work and evaluation on the last of these three points has not been done, and the likelihood of meeting the criteria of the first two points looks to be somewhere between highly improbable and impossible. The JSP needs to be challenged to the maximum extent possible on this weakness in its argument and any tendency towards “wishful thinking”.

3. The A37 itself

One of the difficulties in addressing the long-running problems relating to the A37 is the fact that doing so requires the involvement and cooperation of multiple agencies and local authorities. The key points to take into account are:

- The need for robust origin and destination data for traffic on this section of the road. There is quite good data relating to commuter traffic and one should accept that local goods traffic is both necessary and a “positive” for local businesses and employment. However, a proper up to date analysis of the origin, destination and purpose of heavy freight traffic, much of which is now wholly unsuited to the historic design standards of the A37, is needed. If it already exists it is not evident.

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- Following on from that, there appears to be an underlining strategic problem in that the key “spinal” routes connecting the North of England and the industrial Midlands with the south coast ports are currently still the M5 corridor to the south-west and the A34 corridor to Southampton and Portsmouth. A glance at the map immediately shows the wide “gap” between the two. Freight traffic appears (subject to the results of proper survey work) to be using routes such as the A46/M4/A37 and also the A36 through Bath to compensate for that gap. In doing so, it creates major additional problems for Bath, Bristol and all the communities down the old and inadequate A37. This may well worsen given the known ambitions of Poole and Weymouth in particular to expand their roles as freight ports.
- Assuming one accepts the geographical and financial impossibility bringing the A37 corridor (and the links through to the M4 and A46) up to the full trunk road standards necessary to ensure reasonable flows, legal pollution levels and the required safety standards, then the only possible conclusion is that a new spinal route has to be developed in the “gap” between the A34 and A36/A37. That route would need to be one that avoids major urban settlements to a far greater extent than either the A36 or A37. Of course that is very difficult to achieve, but the best prospect will probably be to develop and improve the route along the line of the A350. Doing so will of course require full cooperation between Bath and North-East Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and Highways England. Bristol would also have major interest as there would be significant benefits to the currently congested and polluted roads in its area and diversion of freight traffic elsewhere would make it easier to accommodate the traffic generated (private and public transport) by its HMA development needs.

Of course this is a difficult and daunting proposition. However, without cooperation and joined-up thinking of this kind, the prospects of other traffic management and road improvement measures on the A37 being anything more than mildly palliative – and indeed quite possibly worsening rather than improving congestion, noise and air pollution are really very slim indeed.

David Worskett. MA (Oxon), FRSA, FCIHT

October 2016