

CHAPTER TEN - ROADS AND MOBILITY

Each chapter in the draft Neighbourhood Development Plan is under constant review and refinement. Not all of the Appendices are yet available but they will be posted on the website as and when they are ready. The text in the chapters should be sufficient, however, to enable you to respond to the questions which are in the leaflet and repeated at the end of the section for your convenience.

Objectives

- SMRM 1 To seek solutions to the traffic congestion issues, to reduce access for heavy vehicles and to balance parking provision with measures to reduce car use.
- SMRM 2 To create a safer, healthier and more accessible environment for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users and to improve air quality.
- SMRM 3 To require any future housing developments to provide safe, convenient routes to enable residents to access shops, services, community facilities and public transport.

Road Network

Stansted Mountfitchet is a community with two commercial centres separated by a steep hill. Both centres, and the areas surrounding them, face critical and worsening traffic issues. The main routes serving, or passing through, the village are as follows:

The B1383, (Cambridge Road and Silver Street), is the main direct North-South route connecting Harlow, Bishop's Stortford, Newport and Saffron Walden.

INSERT MAP?

The B1051 runs down Chapel Hill and through the lower centre of the village and then onto Elsenham and Thaxted with the former village bearing substantial development.

Other routes include a connection west to Manuden and then northward to Clavering, southward to Stansted Airport and eastward to Great Dunmow.

Major routes, within three miles of the Neighbourhood Plan area are the M11 linking London, Stansted Airport and Cambridge and the A120 between Braintree, Colchester, Stansted Airport and Hertfordshire accessing the A10.

Before commenting on the issues facing our community, any proposals for mitigation must be made with the recognition that, except for the planned changes to Junction 8 of the M11, no other major road projects are planned in this part of Uttlesford for the foreseeable future. Any new roads to alleviate traffic volumes through the village would have to be financed through most likely very substantial development, thus posing other problems.

Problems and proposals

The commercial area centred on Lower Street requires an overall plan to be prepared by Essex County Council to address rising traffic movements and parking issues. All the roads funnelling into Lower Street have problems.

Grove Hill – Effectively a single lane road with a blind bend, exacerbated by the parking needed by the residents. Essential to impose and enforce a weight-width restriction both ways. An acute problem which requires urgent action, including a monitoring system to discourage jumping the lights and exceeding a safe speed on the hill.

Church Road – A narrow road serving two housing estates, two schools and as a route to Stansted Airport, M11 and A120. The poorly devised and dangerous traffic calming scheme needs to be replaced with speed cushions to curtail speed in a safer manner. (See Appendix XX for proposals)

PHOTOS OF EACH ROAD TO GO AS PAGE IN APPENDICES

Chapel Hill – Parking, regarded as essential, leaves a stretch of this busy road linking the upper and lower parts of the village as an uncontrolled narrow single carriageway.

Parking should be removed between Woodfield Terrace and Cambridge Road to improve traffic flow. (see Appendix XX for proposals).

The B1383, already recognised by Uttlesford District Council to exceed a 'stress level' of 150%, is one of the most stressed highways in Essex (Uttlesford Transport Study 2017). This situation is set to worsen if UDC continues to permit substantial new development to the North in addition to the 2,200 dwelling Bishop's Stortford North development to the South.

Cambridge Road is a commercial centre containing shops, eating places and services with on-street parking (considered essential for the health of the businesses). The carriageway is sufficiently restricted to prevent traffic from moving freely in each direction. The Parish Council has submitted detailed proposals to overcome the present restraint by using part of the wide footpaths. For details see Appendix X for proposals including pedestrian crossing.

Silver Street has an issue with narrow footpaths and suffers frequent traffic hold-ups especially at peak periods in response to vehicles making a right turn down Chapel Hill. High traffic volume and stationary traffic in a narrow street combine to create poor air quality (see p X). Proposals to improve traffic flow and reduce delays on approach to the Chapel Hill junction need to be assessed and implemented sooner or later (see Appendix XX for a possible way forward including pedestrian crossings).

Assessing more far-reaching solutions

The problems facing the upper and lower village centres – traffic volumes, congestion, large vehicles and poor air quality – need to be viewed as a whole. Essex Highways are requested to analyse the viability of implementing a one-way system and the benefit, or otherwise, of the pedestrianisation of the commercial heart of Lower Street.

Key variables which are difficult to quantify

The volume of traffic arriving in Stansted Mountfitchet or passing through north or south.

The allocation of housing under UDC's Local Plan (third version) either in this village or in Elsenham, Henham and further north in Newport. The upward trend appears to be confirmed with a further 450 CHECK houses approved at Elsenham & Henham in recent months.

Future passenger levels at Stansted Airport which are dependent on the scale and speed of a post Covid-19 recovery and the outcome of the pending appeal to raise the passenger limit to 43mppa.

The speed of progress and areas of development concentrated along the M11 London to Cambridge Economic Development Corridor.

Encouraging safe walking

There is little doubt that walking more brings a direct health improvement with further gains from better air quality and a contribution to reducing carbon emissions.

Whilst there is a comprehensive public right of way network of footpaths and bridleways albeit with work needed on some footpaths in the southeast of the parish, there are a number of problems in the built-up area which not only discourage walking but put pedestrians in danger. Action is needed in the following locations:

Church Road is a heavily used pedestrian route serving two large housing estates and two schools. The narrow width of the railway bridge leads to vehicles frequently mounting the footpath. A scheme is urgently needed to restore the footpath to its full width between Dairy Lane and Forest Hall School to protect pedestrians from being hit by overhanging wing mirrors or being drenched in wet weather is a high priority (see Appendix XX for proposals including crossing points).

Grove Hill has already been discussed earlier but urgent action is required to remove large heavy vehicles and to install bollards, where possible, to prevent vehicles mounting the narrow footpath.

Silver Street footpath needs work on much of its length from the junction with Chapel Hill to the junction with Forest Hall Road although it is recognised that over small sections there is little that can be done to remedy the narrowness of the path. A pedestrian crossing needs to be positioned close to the Chapel Hill junction.

Cambridge Road has one stretch from Five Acres towards High Lane where, with relatively little work, a full width footpath could be provided thus enabling residents of the new development at Walpole Meadows to walk safely to shops and services, situated further along Cambridge Road.

Bentfield Road from Bentfield Gardens to the junction with Bentfield Causeway has a narrow footpath which is especially dangerous for those with disabilities or mothers with buggies. Action is needed to restore the footpath to a proper width.

High Lane has a footpath along its western side until it arrives opposite the former stables by Footpath 19. At this point pedestrians have to cross over the road, on a blind bend, and similarly pedestrians walking from Meadowcroft and Brewery Lane face having to cross this increasingly busy route. (see Appendix XX for proposals to increase pedestrian safety).

Not least is the need to take care of those with restricted mobility, for whom speeding traffic is particularly intimidating. Despite repeated requests to Uttlesford District Council for a survey to identify where action is urgently required, there has been no response. Finally, pedestrians need to be able to cross busy roads safely. Additional crossings in whatever form are required on Silver Street, Church Road and High Lane. Other measures, including central refuges are required along Cambridge Road. In Lower Street, albeit after seven years of waiting, the promised pedestrian crossing has been installed.

Cycleways – yes but where and how?

Sustainable development policies, and health related policies, encourage cycling but there are no official cycleways in the Parish, apart from National Cycle Route No 11 which restarts at the railway station to continue on towards Clavering and onwards to Cambridge. Beyond the boundaries of the plan area, National Cycle Route No 16 commences in neighbouring Birchanger Parish, for onward travel along the Flitch Way. However, with more local cycle travel in mind, investment is needed to construct as safe routes as possible with the following regarded as priorities: **EXPAND**

Stansted Mountfitchet to Bishop's Stortford
Stansted Mountfitchet to Stansted Airport (and Stansted Airport College)
Stansted Mountfitchet to Elsenham (serving Forest Hall School)

(see Appendix X for possible proposals)

Cycle racks should be provided on Cambridge Road and in the two public carparks

Improving public transport is a challenge

Public transport is available but there are weaknesses and usage of buses remains low.

The train service between London and Cambridge (which provides connections to East Anglia and the North as well as the tube at Tottenham Hale) is well used and benefits from the fast Stansted Express service. Pre-Covid-19 rush hour services were overcrowded but the introduction of twelve carriage trains and reduced first class accommodation will increase capacity. Consideration should be given to arranging an additional stop each hour at Bishop's Stortford.

The village is served by three bus services

No 510 – Stansted Airport to Harlow via Forest Hall Park & Bishop's Stortford. Although there is a regular thirty-minute service, the route passes through the eastern edge of the village which limits usage by most residents while an unwelcome downside is the facilitating of fly parking.

No 7/7a– Bishop's Stortford to Stansted Airport via Birchanger, Stansted Mountfitchet, Elsenham and Henham. The service is slow with irregular times and the gaps between buses may be 1 ½ hours. A key advantage is the inclusion of the Herts & Essex Hospital albeit a round trip is lengthy. The **7a** is a two-hourly service which covers Bentfield Green. This route is not well used other than at occasional times in the morning and evening. Greater frequency is needed at peak times, with the flexibility of some route variation, to encourage commuters.

No 301 – Bishop's Stortford to Saffron Walden via Quendon, Widdington and Newport is a regular hourly service. Useful for journeys to Bishop's Stortford but a relatively slow time to travel to Saffron Walden. In terms of Stansted Mountfitchet the timings of the 301 and 7/7a are too close together thus creates long gaps. Better scheduling should be possible.

Parking on and off street raises substantial issues and concerns

The needs may be divided into four categories – long term parking for commuters and employees, fly-parking, short-term parking for local customers and tourists visiting the Castle and Toy Museum.

Long-term parking – Season tickets are purchased by commuters and employees mostly in the Lower Street carpark. However, a sizeable proportion park on-street much to the annoyance of residents.

Fly-parking causes even greater anger as it is for longer periods often with little thought for the inconvenience to residents. The problem is most acute in east of the village.

Short-term parking – Local shoppers often park for short periods and prefer it to be on-street albeit, not infrequently, breaching traffic regulations. Hospitality and services, (including medical), require short-term spaces in car parks while visitors to the Castle and Toy Museum, (a major attraction), need longer periods, also parking for coaches (but not all day).

Residents parking – There are areas designated for residents in Lower Street, Grove Hill and Chapel Hill. Other locations have been considered. Parking is an issue in a number of residential roads.

Considerations for future parking policy

Prior to the impact of Covid-19 the off-street car parks operated at, or close to, capacity and, as the pandemic effect eases, this may again be the position albeit the future level of commuting remains uncertain. Against this background future policy remains open to question.

Commuter Parking – If growth in commuting resumes, more spaces would be required but this raises issues of whether encouragement should be given in light of climate change issues?

Employee Parking, if necessary, should be encouraged to be off-street with incentives. Local residents should not need to use cars unless facing mobility issues.

Tourist Parking for the major attractions, Castle and Toy Museum, needs to be met in the Lower Street car park with safe provision for coaches to put down, park and take up passengers (mostly children).

Local Customers – If legal on-street parking is unavailable, then off-street parking should be located close to amenities. The Lower Street car park needs to be reorganised including a negotiated settlement with the owner of the Castle to allow the car park to be managed as a single entity.

Expand capacity of the Car Parks?

The two car parks may need to be treated in different ways

Crafton Green – This car park predominantly serves customers using local shops and services. Pre-Covid-19 occupancy was high, a position which may return as the impact of the pandemic lessens. In addition, more effective use of the Day Centre and Crafton Green House, in conjunction with the Mountfitchet Exchange may increase demand. The scope to expand the car park is limited to adding perhaps 10-12 spaces on the grassed area.

Lower Street – To make best use of this car park a number of changes need to be made or at least considered:

- The car park is in two ownerships – Uttlesford District Council and the owners of the Castle/Toy Museum. The two areas are managed separately leading to confusion for users. The management of the car park needs to be unified even if a division of income, net of costs, is required.
- The layout of the car park should be reorganised to meet the varying needs more efficiently (see [Appendix X for a possible scheme](#)).
- Expansion of the car park may be possible with the addition of another deck although this raises other issues (see below)

Conundrum – Should the Neighbourhood Development Plan incorporate proposals for additional off-street parking or should policies be directed towards reducing car usage by encouraging safe walking, cycling and more effective public transport?

The future of transport is a critical factor in implementing a successful green agenda

Road traffic is one of the largest contributors to global warming particularly in richer countries. The reduction in carbon emissions is critical and, whilst the step changes will require technological advance and relevant Government policies, this does not preclude local action so, at the risk of repetition, the following require implementation:

- Facilitate changeover to electric vehicles by installing charging points at least in the car parks.
- Improve traffic flows
- Encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport to reduce car usage and improve air quality.
- Promote use of local shops and services
- Reduce the proportion of children driven to school

Inaction is not, and should not be tolerated as an option

It is accepted that there are no simple solutions. However, there is no excuse for doing nothing in critical situations. There are changes which can be implemented to promote safety issues on Grove Hill and Church Road as well as improving air quality issues by improving traffic flows on the B1383 and Lower Street as well as throughout the central area by removing heavy vehicles from this area. In addition, further development should not be permitted without highways improvements.

Policies

- SMTM 1* *Flow of traffic needs to be made smoother* to avoid the worse consequences of stop and start particularly on Cambridge Road, Silver Street, Chapel Hill, Lower Street and Grove Hill.
- SMTM 2* *The crossing of roads needs to be a safe activity* with the introduction of safe crossing points and central refuges where possible to reduce the dangers of speeding vehicles. **LIST SITES FOR NEW CROSSINGS**
- SMTM 3* *Reducing car use* by encouraging walking, cycling and public transport requires investment and co-ordination with other authorities to achieve greater connectivity.
- SMTM 4* *The number of heavy vehicles* moving through the village needs to be reduced, or largely eliminated, with priority action required in the centre of the lower part of the village.
- SMTM 6* Install charging points for electric powered vehicles in car parks.
- SMTM 5* Install cycle racks on Cambridge Road and in the two public car parks.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- 1** **What actions would you suggest which would improve traffic flow along with pedestrian safety? Particular roads of interest are Grove Hill, Lower Street, Chapel Hill, Church Road, High Lane, Cambridge Road and Silver Street.**
- 2** **As a pedestrian, or one with restricted mobility, which roads are difficult to cross and which footpaths need attention?**
- 3** **As a cyclist is there any regular route which you use that could be made safer or any other possible route which would encourage more people to cycle?**
- 4** **Should the capacity of the Lower Street and Crafton Green car parks be increased if possible, or should longterm commuter parking from outside of the village be discouraged?**
- 5** **Do you support and use on-street parking in the centre of the village and do you agree that parking restrictions should be strictly enforced?**
- 6** **What would persuade you to drive less within the village? Would improved public transport encourage change? If so, what changes would you suggest?**

Relevant policies in the ULP and UDLP

- UDLP Policy TA1 Accessible Development
- UDLP Policy TA2 Sustainable Transport
- UDLP Policy TA3 Vehicle Parking Standards
- UDLP Policy TA4 New Transport Infrastructure or Measures
- UDLP Policy INF1 Infrastructure Delivery
- UDLP Policy SP11 London Stansted Airport

Relevant Evidence Base Documents

- Parking Standards, Essex County Council, September 2009
- UDC 2018 Air Quality Annual Status Report
- WYG Transport Planning, Uttlesford Local Plan Transport Study, December 2016

Traffic Counts- Grove Hill
Chapel Hill
Cambridge Road

SpeedWatch data

Maps/plans for junction improvement