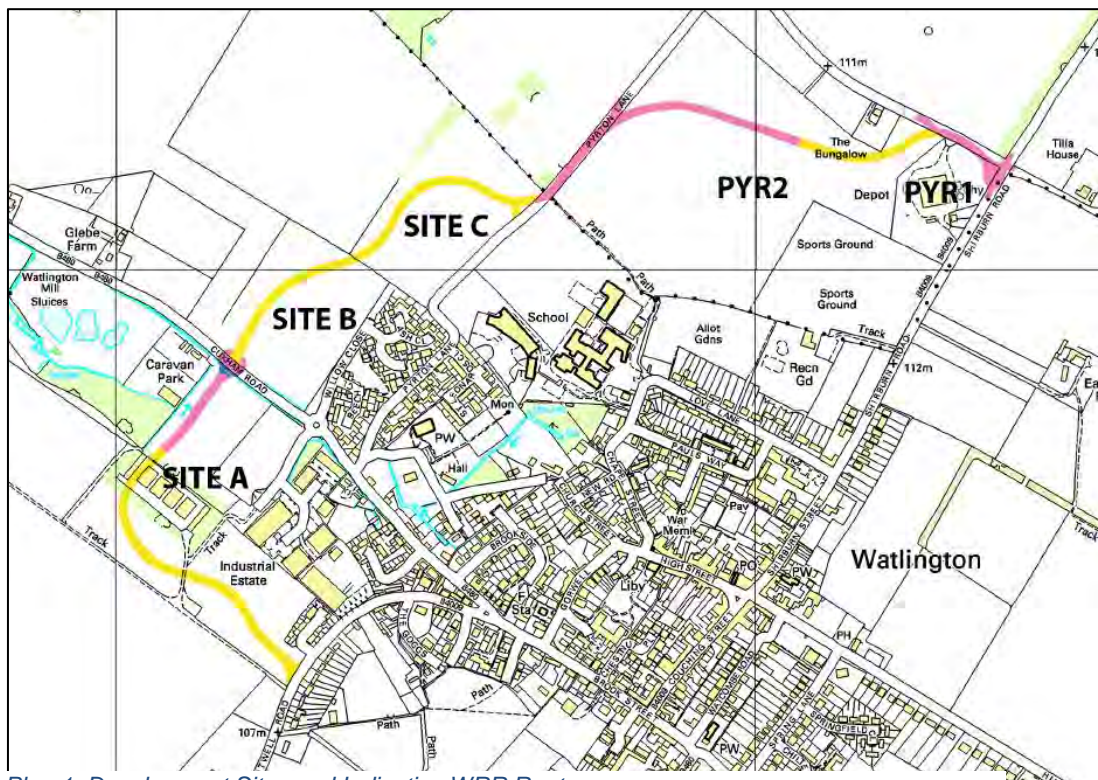


Watlington Relief Road – Note for Environment Agency

15th May 2020

1. Background

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing note is to outline the Watlington Relief Road (WRR) project, the options available for its delivery and update on the current planning context. It is hoped this information can be used by the Environment Agency (EA) to provide a steer on the environmental issues for WRR and how this might also influence their future planning advice.
- 1.2 WRR forms part of the adopted Watlington Neighbourhood Plan and is identified as Local Gap in the Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan. The indicative route is also safeguarded within the emerging South Oxfordshire District Local Plan 2034.
- 1.3 WRR is intended to be a new strategic route that diverts through-traffic away from Watlington town centre, thereby significantly reducing congestion and improving the air quality within the central area. Watlington town centre is a designated air quality management area (AQMA) and is currently the primary route for all forms of traffic going to the M40 Jct 6 from the west.
- 1.4 WRR will also link and enable five housing developments to be delivered (subject to planning permission). These are referred to as Sites A, Site B, Site C, PYR1 and PYR 2, together comprising approximately 400 dwellings, a small amount of commercial land and expanded school playing fields.
- 1.5 Plan 1 highlights the indicative location (as safeguarded) of the entire WRR. The sections in yellow are intended to be built by the respective housing development and the remaining three pink sections are the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council



Plan 1: Development Sites and Indicative WRR Route

(OCC). OCC has obtained Housing and Growth Deal funds (the Growth Deal) to deliver the pink sections as early as possible, and the funds are required to be spent by March 2023.

2. WRR Scheme Description:

2.1 The route of the WRR extends from the western side of Watlington on the B4009, looping northwards, and connecting back to the B4009 on the eastern side of Watlington. The approximate combined length of the OCC sections is 800m. A new shared cycleway/footway (6.3m total width, 3m cycleway on inner edge) will be provided along the route of the WRR, as well as pedestrian crossing points as appropriate.

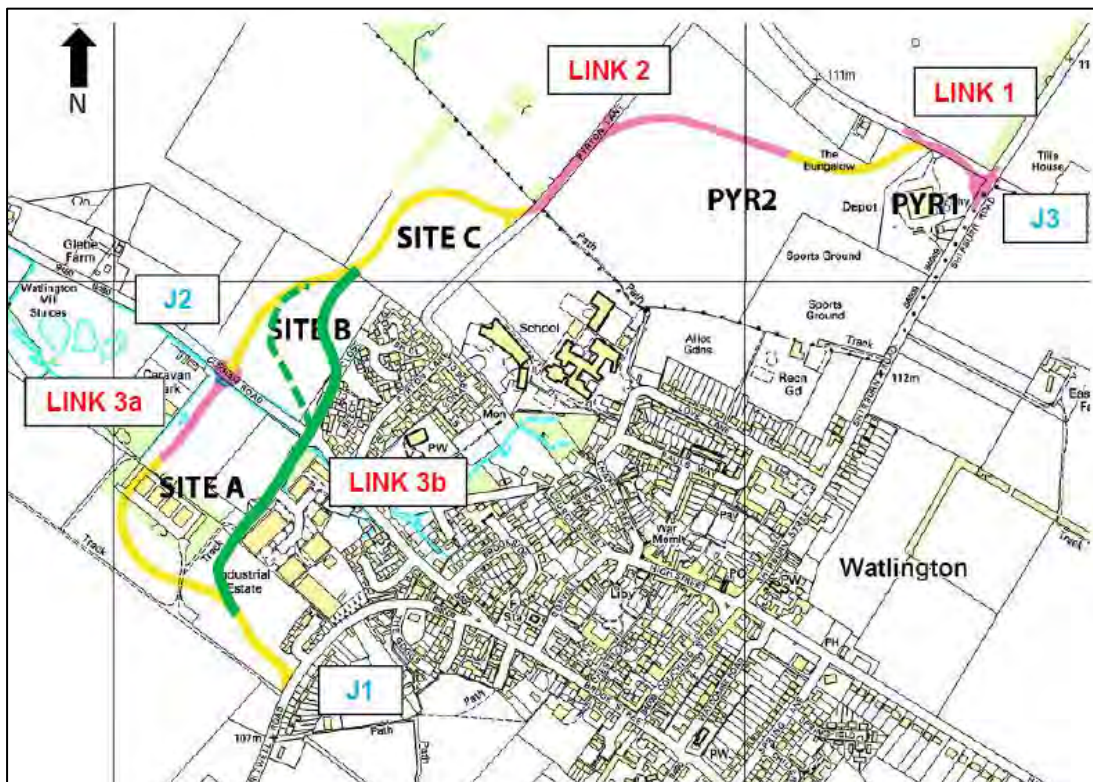
2.2 Three key junctions connecting to the existing highway on the route will be:

2.2.1 junction at Site A / B4009;

2.2.2 junction(s) on B480 between Site A and Site B; potentially involving a new roundabout (Option 1) or utilising the existing roundabout (Option 2), and

2.2.3 roundabout on B4009 at Pyrton Lane junction adjacent to PYR1.

2.3 In addition to the safeguarded route between Site A and Site B, an alternative route has been put forward by the developer of Site A that connects to the existing roundabout on Cuxham Road to Willow Close and the industrial estate road. This route would also alter the direction of the route through Site B. A planning application has been submitted by the developer of Site A, however we are expecting this to be



Plan 2: Development Sites showing alternative 'Option 2' route via Willow Close (in green)

withdrawn on the basis that they now have permission granted for their original application ([Appendix 1](#) provides a summary of each development's planning status).

3. Environment Agency Review

- 3.1 A teleconference meeting took place on 7th April 2020 between, EA, OCC and South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) involving Adil Mohammad, Louise Wicks and Gavin Belcher from OCC, Sarah Green and Jack Moeran from EA, and Emma Bowerman from SODC. EA raised that there are a number of environmental issues that need investigation in respect to the current safeguarded route ('Option 1') relating to flooding, biodiversity and the potential impact on species' habitat around Chalgrove brook.
- 3.2 As the route has been adopted in the neighbourhood plan, EA note that the principle of the route is agreed but have advised OCC that an appropriate technical solution will need to be demonstrated to overcome the environmental issues. It was also discussed that the alternative route ('Option 2') via Willow Close could have less environmental impacts than Option 1, and EA would in principle potentially prefer this option. However, it is acknowledged that the developer of Site A does not yet have permission for this second proposal and is in the process of submitting the relevant information to discharge the conditions on their former application – therefore Option 2 may not be available unless the developer and EA can come to agreement on the FRA information required.
- 3.3 Permitted application P17/S3231/O provides a connection to the safeguarded section (Option 1) but the application did not include the actual road therefore this will require a separate planning application to be submitted. Permitted application P17/S3231/O also does not provide a connection to the Willow Close roundabout. Option 1 will be required to show that there is a satisfactory technical solution that mitigates the environmental issues however this also presents the following infrastructure and deliverability risks:
- 3.3.1 The current safe guarded route for the road goes through flood zone 3 (as shown in [Appendix 2](#)). To ensure year-round safe access and egress, the road would need to be constructed above an agreed modelled flood zone 3 flood level. A flood plain compensation solution to overcome the impact and displacement of flood water storage would have to be addressed
- 3.3.2 A new roundabout at this junction would span over Chalgrove brook, which is classified as an EA main river, and is likely to raise concerns over the use of culverts. The EA are generally opposed to the culverting of watercourses due to the detrimental impacts, such as; ecology quality degradation, increased risk of blockage with a corresponding increase in flood risk, loss of floodwater storage. If culverting is unavoidable, objects can be overcome by specifying short lengths of culverts and appropriate mitigation of flood storage and environmental enhancement.
- 3.3.3 The longer-term possible impacts if Site A progresses with the layout permitted in their first application are;

- a decision on Sites B & C and PRY2 could be further delayed until a technical solution to the route is developed, which will delay the delivery of housing.
- if a technical solution is possible, it is likely that a solution will be more costly to build in a flood zone than normal road building.
- any technical solution would need to take into account the new housing proposed and consider carefully where flood compensation can occur. If the permitted housing development utilises all available land outside the Flood Zone 2 and 3 areas, there may not be sufficient land to allow for flood storage compensation of the road.

3.3.4 There is a risk that if a technical solution is not found, Watlington will:

- not receive a relief road to divert through-traffic away from the AQMA.
- Traffic will continue to have a detrimental impact on the town centre with regards to air quality, noise and the general amenity for those living in and accessing the town centre on foot or more sustainable modes.
- Watlington would not be able to increase its housing supply and South Oxfordshire would see a reduction in their deliverable housing numbers.

4. Actions

- 4.1 OCC are seeking written guidance from EA, providing a steer on the unique environmental issues for both the 'Option 1' and 'Option 2' routes as discussed above. It would also build on that advice provided on 31 October 2019 ([Appendix 3](#)).
- 4.2 EA to provide a steer on the merits and potential disbenefits of each option, in particular relation to flooding and species' habitat and other environmental considerations that should be noted.
- 4.3 In relation to Option 1, EA to advise on those technical solutions which they have been able to support on other sites elsewhere that share similar parallels.
- 4.4 If Option 2 was considered to have less of an environmental it would be helpful if EA could provide a view on how application P19/S4585/O might get the support from EA, in the context that Option 1 has full planning permission granted.
- 4.5 OCC will use this information to support their current feasibility work on Watlington Relief Road and refine the options. It will feed into the delivery strategy and the preparation of an environmental impact assessment (EIA).

Appendix 1:

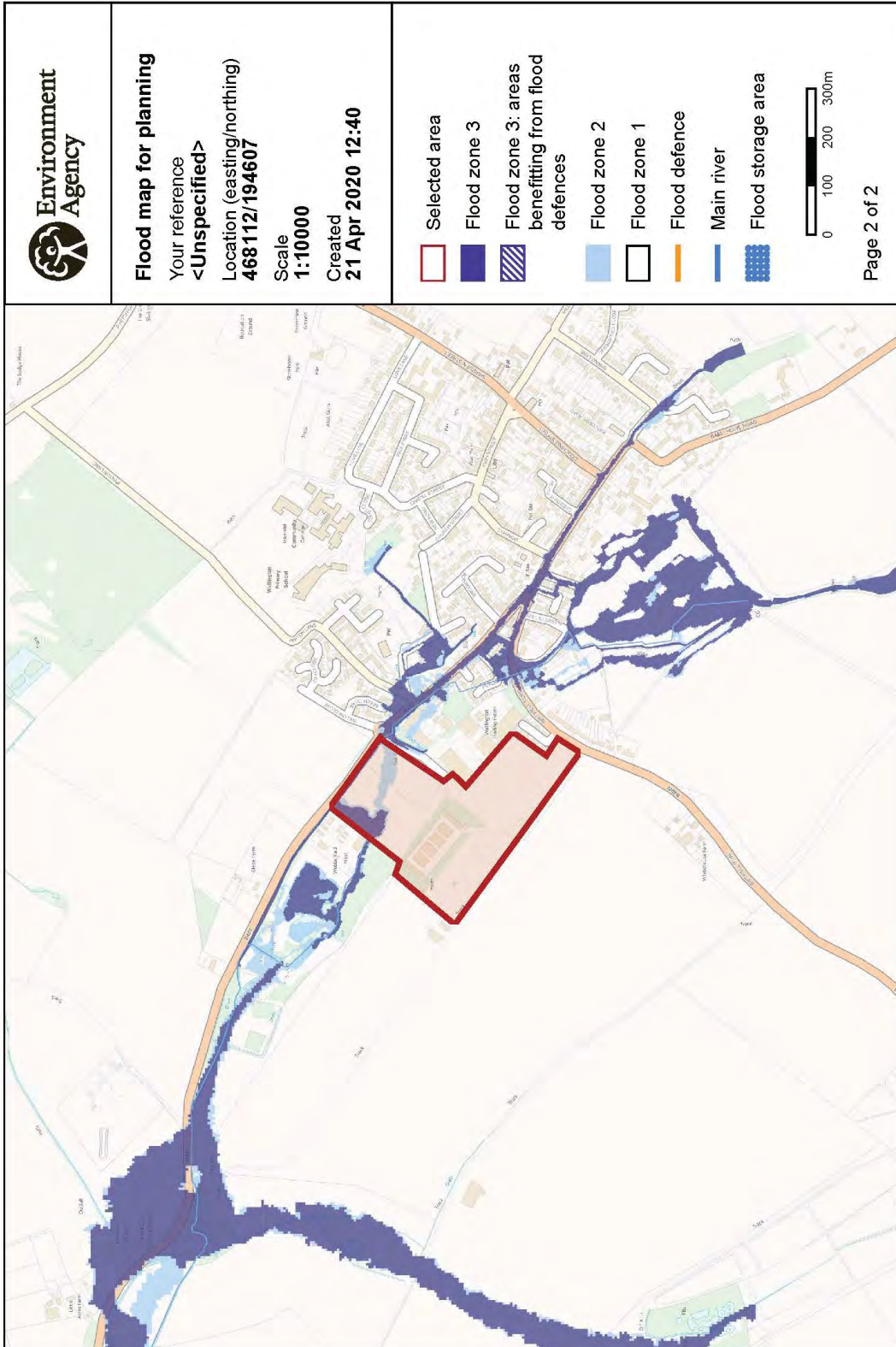
5. Planning Status of the Associated Developments:

5.1 The planning status of each of the housing sites is as follows:

- 5.1.1 **WAT1 (Site_A)** – A Hybrid application ([P17/S3231/O](#)) submitted by Bloor Homes for residential (183 units) and employment (650 sqm B1) has been permitted. This provides road access to link to the safeguarded section, as per [this site layout \(Attached, P17S3231O 25788 SM000-SL-003e\(Site Layout Colour\) ISSUED 14092018\)](#), but does not allow for the alternative option of the primary relief road route linking to Willow close. Site A won appeal APP/Q3115/W/19/3222822 on 25 Feb with edge road alignment to new roundabout on Cuxham Rd.
- 5.1.2 A second application([P19/S4585/O](#)) has been submitted by Bloor Homes and is awaiting determination. This application allows for an alternative [site layout \(Attached, P19S4585O Site Layout Colour drwgno 25788 SM000-SL-003 Rev G\)](#), utilising the access to Willow Close. The EA have raised a concern that the applicant's submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) uses an outdated flood model and has not calculated the full range of climate change flooding extents. Therefore in the absence of an acceptable FRA, EA have objected to this application (but not necessarily to the alternative route shown). The developer is expected to withdraw this application imminently unless the option is deemed viable.
- 5.1.3 **WAT2 (Site_B)** – Outline application submitted ([P19/S1928/O](#)) by Providence Land for 70 dwellings and open space. This application is awaiting determination, although it is dependent on which connection from Site A is taken forward.
- 5.1.4 **WAT3 (Site_C)** – Outline application submitted ([P19/S1927/O](#)) by Providence Land for 60 dwellings and open space. This application is awaiting determination.
- 5.1.5 **PYR1** – Outline planning permission has been granted ([P18/S0002/O](#)) for 37 retirement homes. As part of this permission, OCC secured land for the final section of the Edge Road, linking onto the B4009, which includes space for a roundabout. This was secured through the provisions of the legal agreement associated with this permission. A further Reserved Matters application ([P19/S2380/RM](#)) has been submitted and is awaiting determination.
- 5.1.6 **PYR2** – Outline application ([P16/S2576/O](#)) for 100 dwellings, open space and associated work. This site will also accommodate education sports facilities, and discussions are ongoing with OCC Education Authority regarding the scale of facilities required. This application is awaiting determination.

Appendix 2:

6. Flood mapping



Appendix 3:
7. Extract from EA note: WA/2019/127200/01-L01 - 31st Oct 2019

Rebecca Crowe
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall New Road Oxford
OX1 1ND

Our ref: WA/2019/127200/01-L01

Date: 31 October 2019

Dear Rebecca,

Oxfordshire County Council - transport projects screening

Thank you for sending through the details of your 10 emerging transport projects for an initial screening, and for subsequently allowing me to forward the details of these schemes to my colleagues in Forestry Commission (FC) and Natural England (NE) for their comments.

Below I have set out a summary table of EA and NE interest in each project, contact details for relevant colleagues at FC and NE, generic EA advice applicable to all transport projects and a summary of EA constraints, concerns and/or opportunities for those projects within our remit.

Please be advised that I have sent a cost recover offer for providing detailed pre-application planning advice on your transport projects to your colleague Simon McEneny on 16 October. Please return your approval of this agreement to us when you are ready to proceed.

Defra group interest in your projects

Transport project	EA interest	NE interest
A4130 Widening	Yes	No obvious issues
Clifton Hampden Bypass	No obvious	No obvious issues
Culham to Didcot River	Yes	No obvious issues
Science Bridge	Yes	No obvious issues
Benson Relief Road	Yes	Yes (setting of North Wessex)
Watlington Relief Road	Yes - partially	Yes (setting of Chilterns)
Milton Heights Enterprise	No obvious	No obvious issues
Golden Balls	No obvious	No obvious issues
Relief to Marcham and improvements to Frilford Junction	Yes - partially	Yes (potential indirect impacts on Frilford Heaths, Ponds and Fens SSSI and Barrow Farm Fen SSSI, as well as other biodiversity)
Relief to Rowstock	No obvious issues	Yes (within and setting of North)

Environment Agency – project-specific comments

Watlington Relief Road

EA constraints:

- Link 1: Yes
- Link 2: None
- Links 3a & 3b: Yes

Constraints (Link 1): There is a waste management site on Shirburn Road that may be impacted by the proposed new roundabout/junction on Shirburn Road and Pyrton Lane.

This link section is also in an area of higher groundwater sensitivity – Source Protection Zone (SPZ) 3.

Constraints (Links 3a & 3b): Partially in Flood Zones 2 & 3 (from Chalgrove Brook). The project would also require a crossing of the Chalgrove Brook, which is currently artificially straightened and in a concrete channel / partially culverted. These link sections are also partially in SPZ3.

Considerations:

- Flood risk: Development of a Flood Risk Assessment, requirement for floodplain compensation, need to undertake flood modelling.
- Aquatic ecology: Impacts on ecology associated with the Chalgrove Brook and its floodplain.
- Water Framework Directive (WFD): Assessment of potential WFD impacts.
- Chalgrove Brook crossing design: Consideration of matters including use of a clear-span structure (we would not permit any new culverting of the Chalgrove Brook) and set back from watercourse banks.
- Improvements to Chalgrove Brook: There is an opportunity to make improvements to Chalgrove Brook by deculverting and naturalising the watercourse where feasible.
- Land contamination: Assessment of land contamination issues, especially associated with waste management site and intensive agricultural uses – especially concentrating on the areas of higher groundwater sensitivity (i.e. SPZ3 areas).

Final comments

Our comments are based on our available records and the information as submitted to us. Please note that any views expressed in this response by the Environment Agency are a response to a pre-application enquiry only and do not represent our final views in relation to any future planning application made in relation to this site. We reserve the right to change our position in relation to any such application. You should seek your own expert advice in relation to technical matters relevant to any planning application before submission.

If you have any queries about this response, please do not hesitate to contact me. Yours
sincerely,

Clark Gordon
Strategic Planning Specialist

E-mail clark.gordon@environment-agency.gov.uk

Cc Harry Davis – OCC
Louise Wicks – OCC
Gavin Belcher – OCC
– Natural England
– Forestry Commission

