

Berkhamsted Residents' Action Group

**Statements
to the
Independent Examination
into
Dacorum Borough Council
Core Strategy**

18 September 2012

Issue 3: Accessibility

BRAG would refer the inspector to responses to the Core Strategy, paragraphs 9.11 and 21.13.

BRAG agrees, in principle, with the Core Strategy but have considerable concerns regarding its impact on the local infrastructure. We believe that many key issues have not been adequately addressed. Chief amongst these are:

Safety

- Shootersway is the main access to the new Egerton Rothsay development (SS1) and the proposed Hanburys site (LA4). This road is already an overused rat-run through to the London Road via Woodlands Avenue and Swing Gate Lane. A recently conducted traffic survey showed a peak of 17 vehicles per minute passing through the Woodlands Avenue / Swing Gate Lane junction during the am school journey times (see Appendix 5). A combination of parked cars and buses plus the proximity of two schools makes this a dangerous bottleneck. It is inevitable that some of the extra traffic emanating from the developments on the south side of the town will use this route, thus adding to the safety concerns. It is difficult to see how the road layout would allow “small-scale improvements” as suggested in CS9. Equally, BRAG believes that the built-up nature of the other main south leading roads such as Chesham Road and Cross Oak Road would make ‘small-scale improvements’ impossible.
- Separate to the CS, a new east / west link road has been proposed, by a developer, as a means of easing traffic flow through the town. Its eastern access point would be at the south end of Swing Gate Lane and pass three schools. If, as expected, Berkhamsted changes to a two-tier education system the majority of children at risk will be younger than eleven years old. This adds considerably to the safety concerns expressed above. It is important to stress that Swing Gate Lane is not capable of accepting more traffic and we understand that Hertfordshire County Council shares our concerns regarding this proposal.
- A further major safety issue is the inadequacy of the slip road access to the A41 to the south and east of the town through which it is intended much of the extra traffic will flow. These access roads are classified as Grade 3, the lowest category. These known, high risk areas will be made immeasurably worse not only by increased traffic flows but also by the growth in heavy traffic arising from the ‘super’ dairy being built at Aston Clinton. The Arla website states *‘When the dairy reaches capacity - - - - an average of 20 lorries per hour will come to the dairy.’* This will result in up to 40 extra heavy traffic movements per hour, or around a 1000 per day.

Traffic Density

- The Egerton Rothsay strategic site (SS1) when complete could generate an additional 1260 vehicle movements per day (allowing 7 movements per house). To this can be added the possibility of a further 420 if Hanburys (LA4) goes ahead. This cannot be

acceptable in a town that is already trying to fit a quart into a pint pot. Planned reductions in car usage are only likely to happen well into the future, if at all.

- There is little evidence that the impact of large developments outside the region have been fully recognised. For example, increased through-traffic on the A41 that will inevitably arise from developments in Watford and Aylesbury etc. Developers always state that the A41 runs well below capacity but fail to acknowledge the inadequacy of the slip roads for a 70mph dual carriage way and ignore the morning rush hour traffic which regularly causes 3 mile tailbacks at J20 on the M25.

Berkhamsted Town Centre

- Traffic and parking is a major, recurring problem for existing residents and businesses in Berkhamsted. There are regular traffic hold-ups in Lower Kings Road at the entrance to the Waitrose site and it is only a matter of time before a full gridlock occurs. As this is a key access road for the station and would be a critical part of any bus route, it could be a major impediment to alternative travel plans.
- In the early 1990's, an experimental traffic layout was installed in the main high street. The road was significantly narrowed and central traffic islands put in place. Not surprisingly, delivery vehicles create hold ups and emergency vehicles can find it very difficult to pass by the traffic. Now, it is intended to impose up to an extra 8,000 vehicles movements per day. Where is the long-term thinking?
- BRAG also believes that it was this experimental traffic scheme that also resulted in a re-sequencing of the traffic lights at the centre of the town. This causes long spells of stationary traffic and tailbacks frequently exceeding 200 metres.
- There is no hard evidence that the Berkhamsted Urban Transport Plan will provide meaningful solutions. The New Road / Springfield Road link has been scrapped and the proposed Water Lane development has been in the Local Plan for a number of years and there is currently no time frame for its implementation. If completed, it will offer only a few extra parking places in a town centre where access is becoming increasingly difficult.

Weather

- In recent years, bad winters have become a regular occurrence and, in some cases, freezing conditions have lasted for several days. Most roads leading south out of the valley were not cleared or treated and buses either found them impassable or proceeded with great difficulty. Refuse collection had to be cancelled and four wheel drive vehicles had difficulty in coping. Picture 1 (Appendix 6) gives a typical example (apologies for poor quality).
- The inaccessibility of the hills caused many drivers to abandon their cars on the London Road (see picture 2, Appendix 6), exacerbating travel problems.
- The weather-related accessibility problems for any developments on the valley ridge will require some form of snow clearance programme. This definitely has not

happened in recent years mainly on the grounds of cost and once, we believe, when there was a national shortage of salt.

- BRAG can find no evidence that this particular issue has been addressed in either the Strategy Document or any supporting papers.

Sustainable Travel

- **Bus Travel.** BRAG accepts that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic.
 - A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and, generally, the services to the town centre and further afield are good but usage, for any purpose, remains low.
 - According to the latest available figures (2001 Census), in Berkhamsted, only 2% of commuters use the bus for travel to work. This is despite the fact that the Strategy Document states that 'up to 36% of residents work within Berkhamsted itself'.
 - According to the DfT's 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, which used many of the mechanisms proposed for the bus route improvements, bus trips per person grew by 10% to 22%. This means that, in Berkhamsted, existing residents commuting by bus would increase to, possibly, 3%.
 - An informal survey at Berkhamsted Railway Station suggests that those commuters who live within approximately one mile of the station already walk. Those living further away tend to use a car, either driving themselves or being chauffeured by a family member. Virtually none considered the bus a suitable alternative, claiming unreliability as a primary reason. Without a dedicated bus lane (which would be very difficult within the limited spaces available), it is hard to see how reliability can be improved.
 - For shopping, personal and leisure trips, car travel (driver plus passengers) is by far the most popular mode of travel with bus lagging many points behind. An informal survey suggests that few people would be prepared to use the bus when carrying heavy shopping or for visiting a restaurant or the Rex Cinema. If car use became too difficult, most would use a taxi.
- **Rail Travel.** The prognosis for increased rail travel does not look good. The following comments are taken verbatim from various official reports:
 - Trains are currently overcrowded.

- The cumulative impact of additional demand for rail at all stations will increase pressure on the line, with potential for overcrowding that provides a disincentive for some travellers creating an element of suppressed demand.
 - The only current plans for improvement are to station accessibility and facilities.
 - It is difficult to increase the capacity of the line without major disruptions.
 - The majority of trains at peak times are 8 carriages. There are plans to increase 11 services during the peak hours to 12 carriages, but there are no resources at present.
 - One time table path in the morning high-peak hour and three in the evening three hour peak have been identified for additional services. The types of trains that can be used in these slots are restricted due to platform constraints at Euston. Again the resources are not available at present.
 - In the short/mid-term, capacity is not going to be increased.
- **Walking.** As stated above, walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to 13½%.

It is difficult to envisage walking being as popular for the new developments as most are some distance out of town and at the top of steep gradients.

- **Cycling.** Not surprisingly, cycling, with just 1%, is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG's traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially *ascending* the hill. In fact, we can only remember seeing one brave soul doing this in recent weeks. With most new developments being on ridge tops, with very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is unlikely to be considered a realistic, alternative form of transport.

- **Smart Travel Initiatives.** Many of the Smart Travel initiatives are based upon experience from similar schemes but it is difficult to see how many of these experiences are transferable. For example, it is claimed that:

- 'This initiative has been successfully implemented in towns and cities across England including nearby Watford at a cost of approximately £25 per household.' This misses the crucial point that Watford is on fairly flat terrain with a highest point well below 100m amsl, whereas the Berkhamsted ridge lies some 150m amsl with a climb of 50m from the valley.
- The same qualification must be applied to other initiatives such as the DfT's 'Sustainable Travel Towns' project. Here, one of the towns, Darlington, lies in the Tees Valley; another, Peterborough has a highest point of 25m amsl.

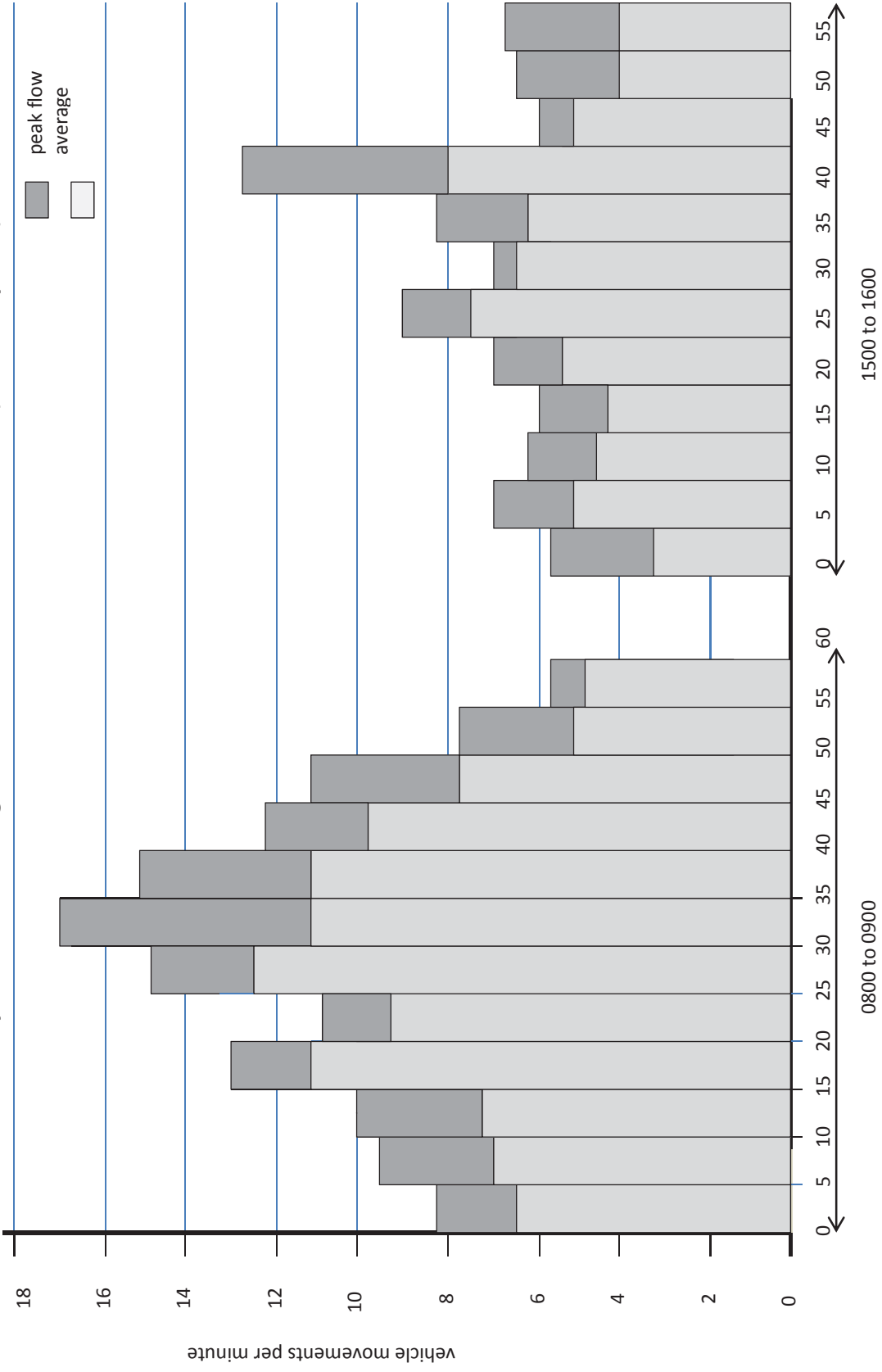
- **Conclusions**

In principle, BRAG accepts Dacorum's Core Strategy and the needs upon which it is based. We also accept that that 'to encourage travel by sustainable modes it may be necessary to discourage trips by unsustainable modes.' But we do have concerns regarding the loss of amenities that will inevitably occur and there is also a general uneasiness about the practicality of many of the transport proposals. We fear that, (like the experimental traffic layout of the 1990's), various interventions will be attempted that, in the long-run, do more harm than good.

Long after the architects of the various strategies have moved on, we will still be living in this town.

Appendix 5

Traffic Survey – Junction of Swing Gate Lane with Woodlands Avenue (9 to 13 July 2012)



Appendix 6

Picture 1. Hall Park Gate Impassable to Traffic (December 2009)



Appendix 6

Picture 2. Cars Abandoned Along London Road. (December 2009)

