



CYCLE SAFE ROUTES SUBGROUP

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28th September 2019

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Cycle Safe Woodstock

An Overview

Woodstock is a traffic watershed. South of the town the influence of Oxford City is overwhelming. Commuter traffic and rush hour congestion demand a high level of infrastructure provision for cycling. Delivery of that infrastructure is patchy. Good cycle paths exist but there are glaring omissions (such as the absence of any cycle provision on the busy Eynsham to Oxford B4044).

North of Woodstock many roads are suitable for cycling using the existing general road network. (Sustrans defines suitability as being safe for an unaccompanied twelve year old). Of course, judging suitability is subjective. There are many factors apart from traffic volumes. Average speeds, carriageway alignment and width, the proportion of HGVs are all factors to take into account in considering the safety of cyclists. Nevertheless, north of the town of Woodstock, sharing road space becomes a practical option in many places. There are exceptions. The busy A44 north of the town carries over 12,000 vpd some 7% of which are HGVs. Average speeds are high despite a 50 mph speed limit and forward visibility is, in places poor, providing limited opportunity for vehicles to overtake cyclists. The need for new cycling infrastructure north of the town to take cyclists off the A44 is therefore a high priority for Cycle Safe Woodstock.

Part of the reason for the lack of alternative cycling routes in the immediate area of Woodstock is the presence of the large block of land that is Blenheim Park through which there are, at present, no cycling opportunities. I will come back to the Blenheim issues later.

To the south of the town the A44 has good segregated cycle tracks on both sides of the dual carriageway into Oxford. Some local improvements and a better level of routine maintenance is needed but these are not issues of major capital expenditure.

The A4095 that runs broadly east west through Bladon is, like the A44, problematic. However, from Hanborough railway station west to Witney the route is served, almost entirely, by an adequate shared cycle footway. Again, there are sections that are sub-standard, and a section that is missing at North Leigh that requires a modest detour for cyclists, and, once again, the level of routine maintenance requires attention. But at least the nucleus of a safe route is established.

But the missing link is east of Hanborough railway station to and through Bladon and continuing to Woodstock and the A44. This, like the A44 north of Woodstock is therefore a high priority for Cycle Safe Woodstock.

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Blenheim

Historically speaking, the Blenheim estate has been opposed to cycling within the walled parklands and this has effectively removed a 180 degree arc of opportunity for cycle routes, either leisure or recreational, to the west of the town.

It is undeniable that permitting cycling in Blenheim presents the Estate with some problems. Blenheim relies for the upkeep and maintenance of the fabric of its World Heritage Site a regular income from its events programme. Events are often open air and separating paying guests from non-paying cyclists (and walkers) is difficult. But it has to be acknowledged that there are, at present, a series of public rights of way that criss-cross the estate and these are managed without unduly compromising the events programme. However, any successful campaign for cycle routes in Blenheim must acknowledge the need for them to be kept away from the general events area of the park.

Connectivity with Other Communities.

Woodstock is a significant service centre and many outlying villages have needs that are met in Woodstock but may not be available in their own communities. In particular, the Woodstock Marlborough Secondary School has a wide catchment area well beyond the town itself. The town also offers a primary school, a general medical practice covering a wide area, a pharmacy, a veterinary service, several employment opportunities, and leisure services such as the Oxfordshire Museum and a swimming pool. It has a reasonable (though declining) spread of shops and is a popular destination for people visiting its wealth of pubs, cafes and restaurants. Connectivity between Woodstock and the surrounding villages is therefore of mutual importance.

Bladon and Hanborough

Bladon no longer has any local services other than its primary school. It has poor cycle connectivity to either Woodstock or Hanborough although there is a good pedestrian link through Blenheim Park. Hanborough has a good level of services, an important rail link to Oxford and good cycle links west to Witney. But cycle links to Bladon and Woodstock are difficult and require segregated shared cycle footway provision between the railway station and Bladon and other safety measures within Bladon itself. Both communities will need better connectivity provision to the new Eynsham Garden Village (not considered further here)

Begbroke and Yarnton

These communities to the south of Woodstock are connected by the adequate and existing segregated cycle tracks alongside the A44

Kidlington

Kidlington is a larger community than Woodstock and is largely self-sufficient with adequate cycle links to Oxford. However, the upgrading of an existing bridleway linking Kidlington to Begbroke and the A44 cycle tracks to Woodstock would add an important cycle link for Kidlington, Begbroke and Woodstock.

Stonesfield and Combe

To the north and west of Woodstock lie the villages of Stonesfield and Combe. Other than a primary school, Combe has few services within the village but has reasonable links to Hanborough via the existing minor road network. Hanborough has a Coop, GP surgery and several other services. But Combe's cycle links to Woodstock are entirely inadequate. A link through Blenheim Park would be hugely beneficial (particularly for Marlborough School students). Additionally a

segregated, shared cycle footway alongside the A44 from Woodstock to the B4437 junction at the Duke of Marlborough pub would provide the basis for an alternative cycle safe route. Stonesfield has a convenience store and a primary school but few other services and it, too, would benefit from a segregated, shared cycle footway alongside the A44 from Woodstock to the B4437 junction at the Duke of Marlborough pub.

Wootton

Wootton has an excellent community shop and a primary school but few other services. The school has a declining school role and is in danger of closure. A significant number of families on the northern fringes of Woodstock fall within the Combe school catchment area and the travel distance is not significantly different for these families between the Wootton school and the Woodstock Primary School. However, the opportunities for sustainable travel (by bike or on foot) between Wootton and Woodstock are difficult to say the least. A segregated, shared cycle footway alongside the east side of the A44 from Woodstock to the first Wootton turning therefore becomes an essential requirement, particularly in the light of the imminent development of a further 120 new homes in the northern part of Woodstock (Hill Rise, Old Woodstock site). An alternative would be to upgrade the existing public right that runs directly between Wootton village and Old Woodstock (Hill Rise). Currently the right of way is on foot only and it would need to be upgraded to a bridleway with some engineering alterations and improvements.

Tackley

Tackley to the north east has a community store and primary school and a railway station connecting to Oxford but few other services. For the most part there is reasonable connectivity to Woodstock via the existing minor road network but there is a difficult and potentially dangerous crossing of the busy and fast A4260 road at Sturdy's Castle and the engineering solution to such a crossing is certainly not straightforward.

Within Woodstock

Connectivity within Woodstock is good with the glaring exception of walking and cycling on the busy A44. The A44 carries between 12,000 and 15,000 vehicles per day, some 700 of them HGVs. Due to the narrow carriageways and footways, pedestrians and cyclists are extremely vulnerable and feel intimidated. Despite low accident figures we believe that the need for an alternative off-highway pedestrian cycle route is overwhelming and that the need precisely matches the County Council's (the Highway Authority) policies on the protection of vulnerable road users and the encouragement of more sustainable travel wherever possible. The proposals have the support, in principle, of Woodstock Town Council.

Drawings showing where the proposals outlined in this overview might be situated are attached hereto as an appendix.

Key to Appendix plans:

Existing cycle infrastructure shown in purple

Safe routes using existing highway network shown in pecked brown

Proposed new cycle infrastructure shown in green

Map 1: Woodstock and surrounding villages

Map 2: Villages to the west of Woodstock and Blenheim

Map 3: Blenheim

Map 4: Within Woodstock

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