



website: www.wiltshire.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1

TROWBRIDGE SECONDARY SCHOOLS JOINT TRAVEL PLAN MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 19 JULY 2006 AT COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE

Present:

Mr Andrew Davis	(Chairman for the meeting)
Mrs Grace Hill	(Member for Trowbridge East)
Mr Steve Oldrieve	(Member for Trowbridge East)
Mr Jeff Osborn	(Member for Trowbridge West)
Mr Colin Kay	(Headteacher, The Clarendon College)
Mr Brenden Wall	(Headteacher, St Augustine's Catholic School)
Nigel Hunt	(Head of School Buildings & Places, Department for Children & Education)
John Murray	(Education Officer [Planning], Department for Children & Education)
Ian White	(Passenger Transport Manager, Department for Environmental Services)
Phil Grocock	(County Council Bus Network Manager, Department for Environmental Services)
Alan Creedy	(Local Transport Plan Manager, Department for Environmental Services)
Bill Prendergast	(Travelwise Manager, Department for Environmental Services)
Karen Linaker	(Scrutiny Support Officer, Democratic & Members Services)

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Packer.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

Mr Oldrieve informed the meeting that his children were pupils at The John of Gaunt School. Mrs Hill informed the meeting that she lived on one of the busy roads into Trowbridge.

3. **Purpose of the Meeting**

All noted the background to and purpose of the meeting, which was to act on the recommendation of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, agreed at its 30th November 2005 meeting:

"that officers be requested to meet with the members for Trowbridge with a view to devising a suitable travel plan that would improve conditions for children's travel to / from school across the whole of the town, but in particular from east to west Trowbridge."

In doing so, the ward members for Trowbridge updated the meeting regarding their views and concerns on the matter, which included:

- (a) accepting that a secondary school for east Trowbridge could not be achieved in the short or even medium term, there was a need to implement effective interim measures to ease traffic congestion and highway safety problems, associated with the daily school run;
- (b) as each of the Trowbridge secondary schools had their own individual travel plans, if actioned jointly, these could serve as an effective interim measure;
- (c) a number of the roads leading into and across the town became heavily congested particularly around the school run time;
- (d) agreed plans to further increase the town's residential population could exacerbate current congestion and highway safety problems;
- (e) different start and finish times at each of the schools did not yet appear to have eased matters; and
- (f) whilst accepting that the key objective was to ease congestion and safety problems associated with the secondary school run, other contributing factors, including that of the primary school run, were also relevant.

4. Current Capacity Issues in Trowbridge Secondary Schools

- (a) the Education Officer (Planning) provided forecast figures for each of the schools, as follows:

	Pupils on Roll Sept 2005	Pupils on Roll 2011/2012
The John of Gaunt	1,370	1,425
The Clarendon College	1,322	1,709
St Augustine's Catholic School	971	989

- (b) Mr Kay emphasised that these figures were only estimates, which the officer explained were based on 'roll-on' trends from primary schools, and that the forecasts took into account likely increases in roll from known new residential developments; and
- (c) Mr Wall expressed a view that the future in-take of pupils at St Augustine's School was likely to be significantly less if the Council's proposal to withdraw support for denominational transport was agreed, and that this decision could even lead to the closure of the school, a consequent increase in roll at the remaining secondary schools in the town, and could see pupils preferring to attend their nearest schools, i.e. Devizes School.

5. Progress in identifying potential sites for relocating an existing secondary school

- (a) the Education Officer explained that, as the case for building a fourth secondary school had not been proven, and that the new developments in Trowbridge could not yet sustain their own secondary school, it was unlikely that a school for the east of the town could be achieved before receipt of Building School for the Future (BSF) monies in 2016 at the earliest. He explained that this funding was intended to re-build and replace secondary school buildings, as opposed to providing new schools;
- (b) he went on to explain that, even before being offered the £20m pathfinder funding back in October 2005 to re-build one of Wiltshire's secondary schools, when officers had explored the possibility of using these funds to re-build John of Gaunt School, the Council had been actively trying to find a suitable and available area of land to the east of the town to re-locate one of the secondary schools in readiness for the BSF programme;
- (c) it was noted that, as a result of this work, the West Wiltshire District Planning Authority had offered four possible sites, none of which were owned by the County Council. Consequently, the Council had been unable to proceed with securing a suitable site, due to a lack of available funds and due to the concern that, in earmarking land for 2016 for a school, WCC could be accused of blighting the use of that land for other purposes;
- (d) Mr Osborn asked for confirmation and reassurance that, as resolved, when confirming which school would receive the £20m pathfinder funding, progress in preparing re-build projects for schools at Laverstock and the John of Gaunt School would be made and reported to the December 2006 Cabinet meeting; and

- (e) all agreed that the consultation exercise on which school to re-locate to the east of Trowbridge, in preparation for receipt of BSF monies from 2016, would need to be carefully managed and include all relevant stakeholders, in order not to de-stabilise the successful future of each of the three secondary schools, and in recognising that the existing schools, not being relocated, would need significant upgrading simultaneously to prevent parents perceiving them as less attractive. Mr Kay emphasised that all three schools were increasingly collaborating on such matters as education for 14 – 19 year olds, and that the effect of a relocation on such developments would have to be considered.

6. Current Congestions Issues and Travel Planning

- (a) the Council's Local Transport Plan Manager explained that, congestion was a relative term, and that by national standards the levels of queuing and delay experienced within Trowbridge were modest by comparison with larger settlements. However, he emphasised that this fact did not help to ease the perception that the town experienced traffic congestion at particular times of the day;
- (b) he explained that the Council tried to ease both the reality and perception of this matter through creating additional road capacity where possible, adding in bus lanes, cycle and pedestrian routes, and by encouraging vehicle users to think and behave differently in how they travel – in part through promotion of Travel Plans;
- (c) the Travelwise Manager then explained that whilst each of the three secondary schools had their own individual Travel Plan and accompanying action plan to drive its implementation, which had been devised in partnership with the Council, their levels of implementation varied. He stressed that, whilst the Council did provide advice, guidance and assistance on travel planning matters, the success of the Plan depended upon the individual school's ability and capacity to action it;
- (d) data and maps were distributed to illustrate the volume and pattern of the different ways in which pupils travel to each of the secondary schools. Whilst showing varying trends, each demonstrated that there was a need to continue to promote and encourage more sustainable modes of travel;
- (e) the Travelwise Manager explained that in comparison with the national average, Trowbridge had a higher than average number of pupils travelling to school by car and bus, a lower than average number of pupils walking to school, and that the town was in line with the national average for pupils cycling to school, albeit a disappointingly low level; and
- (f) Mr Kay observed that there was potential for the secondary schools to achieve more in their travel planning by working together and even pooling grant monies. The Travelwise Manager highlighted that the only real benefits for a joint travel plan were for staff to car share, but that plans ought to be considered strategically at the highest level along with other such issues, leaving site management to the individual schools.

7. The Role of Passenger Transport

- (a) the Passenger Transport Manager outlined the policy issues regarding passenger transport for schools, including the eligibility criteria, cost of free transport to the Council, and the criteria for providing subsidised public transport for children who were not entitled to free school transport;

- (b) he also outlined the likely impact of new policy arising from the Education & Inspections Bill, a key implication being that parents expectations would rise regarding their choice of where to send their children to school, which would in turn, lead to additional demand for expensive transport, for which funding had not been made available;
- (c) it was noted that these policy changes were also to be viewed in the context of year on year above inflation increases in bus operating costs since 1989;
- (d) the Passenger Transport Manager, whilst recognising the opportunities afforded by the new Act, and consequent £40m additional government funding, to assist low income families with transport to school costs, nonetheless was wary of the risks in extending school bus services beyond this new statutory minimum, not least - raising service users' expectations and creating new service commitments that would be difficult to withdraw from if circumstances changed; and
- (e) the County Council Bus Network Manager referred to the increasing demand for passenger transport in Trowbridge, and yet the lack of funds to meet this demand, which he emphasised was not helped by the practical issue of buses needing to be a particular (and smaller) size in order to be able to drive through the tight network of roads in residential areas during the rest of the day. He also noted that congestion from Hilperton in the peak morning rush had significantly reduced since the change of schools times at the start of the academic year.

8. Next Steps

- (a) although pupils at the schools had been asked their views in the past regarding reasons for their choice in travel to school, it could be worthwhile re-assessing pupils views, combined with an attempt to raise the profile of sustainable travel behaviour;
- (b) schools should do more to action their Travel Plan to win the 'hearts and minds' of parents and pupils;
- (c) staff in the three schools could also contribute to the sustainable travel agenda by running car-share schemes;
- (d) there was scope for the schools to work more collaboratively in implementing their Travel Plans, and a possibility that this could be assisted further by involving the whole community;
- (e) there was a balance to be struck when implementing schemes to promote sustainable travel, and making these work well, without exacerbating problems for legitimate vehicle users, i.e. making a road narrower, and so more prone to congestion, to make room for a cycle route or bus lane;
- (f) future discussions on this matter and possible recommendations would need to take into account the results of the consultation exercise regarding the Council's proposal to withdraw support for denominational transport;
- (g) officers from the Department for Children & Education and the Department for Environmental Services were requested to present a report to the September meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, detailing:
 - a summary of the discussions at this meeting
 - current travel plan arrangements at each of the three secondary schools

- the arguments for and against devising a joint travel plan for the secondary schools
- possible alternatives to a joint travel plan, i.e. the retaining of individual plans, but improved collaboration between the schools with respect to the implementation of those plans
- the outcome and likely impact (relevant to this matter) of the consultation on the Council's proposal to withdraw support for denominational transport
- analysis of the impact on traffic congestion from the different start times of the schools
- the likely impact of the new Education Act on passenger transport for schools
- up to date forecasts of pupil numbers for each of the schools

(Duration of meeting: 8.30 am – 10.00 am)

The Officer who produced these minutes is Karen Linaker, Scrutiny Officer, Corporate & Library Services Department, direct line: 01225 713056.