

High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan – Cross-town Alternative Route

Landscape & Ecological Scoping Study, June 2011

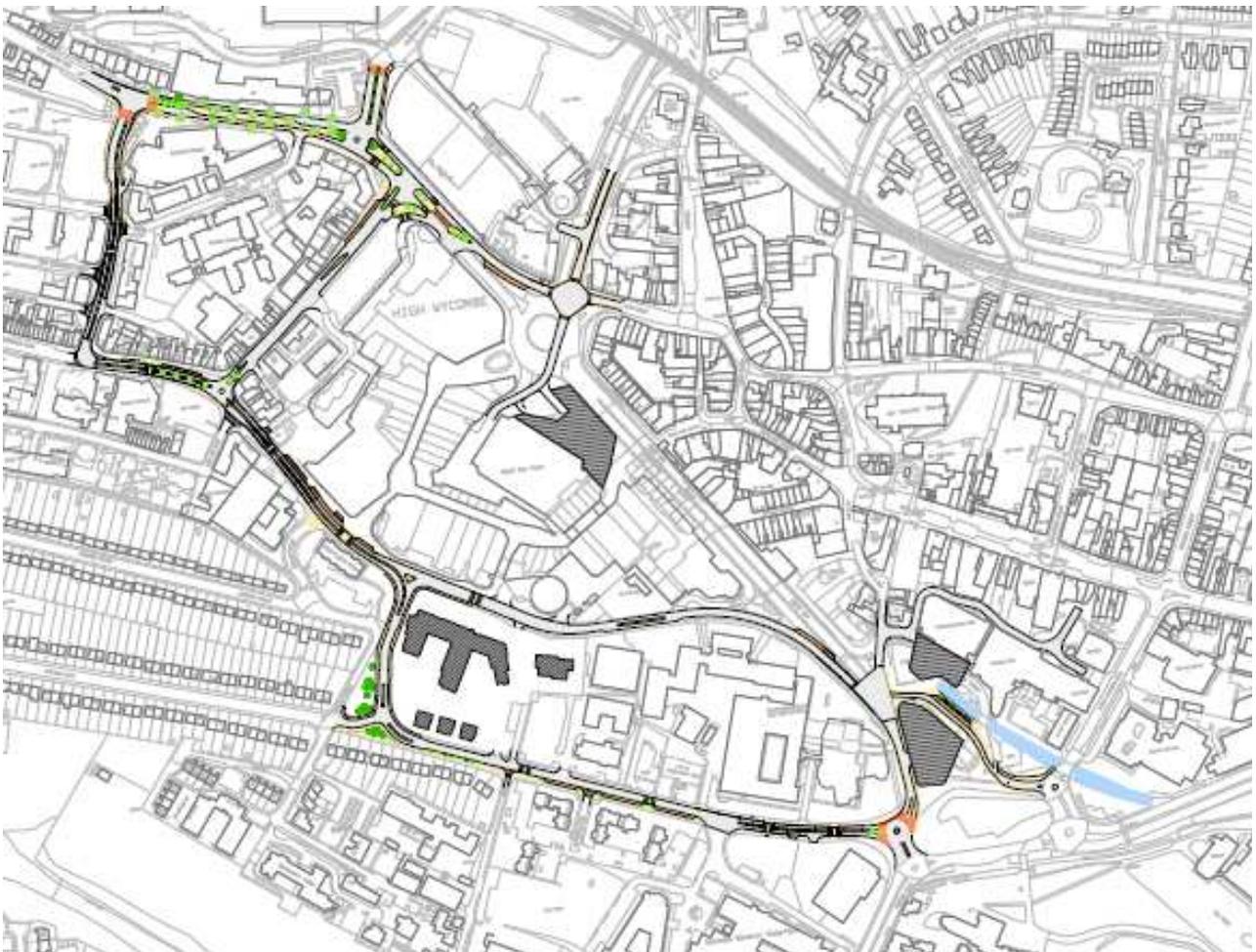
Introduction

This document has been prepared to consider the potential ecological and landscape & visual impacts of the proposed alternative cross-town route. This document is a high-level scoping assessment that highlights potential impacts and outlines further work areas where required. A full assessment has not been carried out at this stage.

The proposal

The alternative route extends from the Marlow Hill/Queen Alexandra Road to the junction of West Wycombe Road / Westbourne Street link (See map below)

Map 1: Development proposal



This scoping study considers the potential impacts of the following three main components:

1. Impact of the new route
2. Impact of Westbourne Street link
3. Impact of taking out the flyover

Table 1: Development proposal

| | Development component: | Development details: |
|----------|---|--|
| 1 | Alternative cross-town route | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of the existing road network • Changes to layout and design of the road environment (e.g. shared surfacing, removal of street clutter, tree planting) • New link road through gas works site |
| 2 | Westbourne Street link | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New road link to connect Westbourne Street with West Wycombe Road |
| 3 | Removal of flyover & redevelopment (including River Wye) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of fly-over • Opening-up of a section of the river Wye • Potential removal of selected buildings (e.g. fire station) • New development in town centre |

A) Ecology

Methodology

A preliminary assessment of potential ecological impacts has been carried out by:

1. A desktop review on designated sites, protected habitats, and protected and notable species;
2. A site visit to assess sites and features for their potential ecological value.

1. Desktop survey – designated sites and species within 1km radius

Findings of this desktop survey are based on the Council's policy & constraint GIS layers, BCC's habitat mapping and BMERC (Bucks Milton Keynes Biodiversity Record Centre) datasets on habitats and species.

Designated sites (within 1 km radius):

Table 2: Nature conservation sites and habitats within 1km radius

| Designation | Name | Designation | Distance (approx. in m) | Notes |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Nationally designated sites | There are no nationally designated sites (SAC, SSSI, NNR or Ancient Woodlands) within 1 km radius. | | | |
| Locally designated sites | Tom Burts Hill | LWS | 150 m | Grassland |
| | High Wycombe Pit | LGS | 160 m | Chalk exposure |
| | High Wycombe Cemetery | BNS | 480 m | Basic grassland |
| | Hill behind Wycombe Hospital | BNS | 300 m | Basic grassland |
| | The Rye | BNS | 360 m | Basic grassland |
| BAP Priority habitats | The River Wye (chalk stream) | BAP Priority Habitat | 0 - 10 m | Chalk stream |

Protected and notable species:

The BMERC dataset shows a total of 119 protected and notable species including amphibians, birds, insects, mammals and plants within 1 km radius. No protected and notable species have been recorded along the route itself. The lack of any records does, however, not necessarily mean that protected are not present but only that they have not been recorded so far.

2. Site visit

The proposed route was walked to assess whether there are any sites or features of ecological value that are affected by the development. The following sites/key features of potential ecological interest were identified:

- Trees (street trees, groups of trees)
- Derelict land (former Gaswork Site)
- River Wye (chalk stream)

Initial findings - Ecology

Table 3: Initial findings - ecology

| Development | Sites/ features of ecological interest affected | Location | Potential impacts | Information/ action required |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Impact of new route - road alignment | Street trees , groups of trees | Link road through Gas works site Westbourne Street / West Wycombe Rd link | Loss of trees Potential impact on bats | Tree survey to BS standard Tree inspection for bats |
| | Derelict land | Gasworks site | Habitat loss – depending on ecological interest and connectivity, site could potentially be BAP priority habitat Potential impacts on reptiles, invertebrates, birds & mammals | Phase 1 Habitat Survey (initially) Follow-up surveys based on recommendations from Phase 1 Habitat survey - reptile survey likely to be required Assessment whether the site satisfies the criteria of a BAP Priority habitat |
| Westbourne Street link | River Wye | Westbourne Street / West Wycombe Rd link | Potential impact on chalk stream and surrounding habitat , e.g. direct impact on banks and vegetation, contamination caused by run-off from roads/ pavements | More information on link construction and surrounds; Engineer's assessment on impact on weir and water course; Information on drainage required; Potential need for hydrological and ecological survey (liaise with EA) |
| Removal of flyover & redevelopment (including River Wye) | River Wye | Nr Wycombe Swan / Liberal club | Potential impact on chalk stream caused by additional River Wye crossings and works to banks Potential impact of new development | More details on river crossings, development and works to banks required Potential need for hydrological and ecological survey (liaise with EA) |
| | River Wye | Former Abbey Way flyover, | Potential beneficial impacts through opening up the river and river bank treatments | More details on river design required; Potential need for hydrological survey (liaise with EA) |

Conclusions:

A significant impact on designated nature conservation sites is not likely. Initial thoughts on further work areas are outlined in table 2 above. More detail on development proposal and further ecological survey information are required to assess the ecological impact of the development in

full especially with regard to protected and notable species, the chalk stream BAP priority habitat and the gasworks site. A full ecological assessment in accordance with best practice guidelines (Guidelines for Ecological Assessment) should be carried out.

Notwithstanding the potential findings of any future ecological survey information, it is likely that potential ecological impacts can be overcome through appropriate mitigation and enhancement.

B) Landscape/ townscape and visual

Methodology:

Potential landscape and visual impacts have been assessed by:

1. A desktop survey;
2. A site visit.

1. Desktop survey

Review of landscape designations:

No national or local landscape designations will be affected by the development.

Review of landscape character information:

Little landscape character information is available for the built-up areas of High Wycombe. An exception to this is the Historic Urban Assessment by BCC (currently still Draft), which divides the town into Historic Urban Zones. Zones include 'Commercial Modern', 'Desborough Road', 'Cressex Industrial', 'White Hart Street' and 'Desborough Industrial'. None of these areas appear to be particularly sensitive to this development.

The High Wycombe conservation area lies north of the Abbey Way flyover and adjoins the flyover in places.

2. Site visit

The area affected by the development is urban in nature and characterised by a mixture of commercial buildings, employment and residential uses. Buildings vary in style and height, and no dominant character is apparent. In visual terms the main receptors are residents, visitors, shoppers, motorists and pedestrians.

The site visit highlighted the following landscape elements and features in the area:

Landmark buildings: the New Bucks University building,

Trees: mature trees along Queen Alexandra Road, nr Rutland Street and at Westbourne Street

Important views include: views towards and from the surrounding hills, towards the New Bucks University building, towards the Wycombe Swan and towards the HW conservation area including St. Mary's Church.

Initial findings – Landscape & Visual:

| Development component | Landscape issues | Visual issues | Initial thoughts | Information / action required |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| A 40 Road alignment | Changes to appearance of existing roads Loss of trees Increased traffic volumes is likely to change landscape perception of some of the roads | Loss of trees in the public realm Less street clutter | Development is unlikely to raise major L&V issues as it a) uses the existing road network, b) the use is already established c) design changes are relatively minor. Tree loss is likely to have adverse impact on public realm. Design changes such as removal of street clutter and tree planting could have beneficial visual effects. | More details on design required A more detailed assessment should be carried out once more details are available |
| Westbourne Street link | Loss of trees | Loss of trees and additional road connection is likely to result in a harder urban environment | New link and junction will result in busier and 'harder' street environment | More details on link and junction design required A more detailed assessment should be carried out once more details are available |
| Removal of flyover & redevelopment (including River Wye) | Removal of flyover: potential positive impact on town centre character Potential positive impact on HW conservation area New development: landscape impact depends on type, height and design of development | Removal of flyover: improved visual connectivity between the old and the new part of the town centre New development: visual impact (positive or negative) depends on type, height and design of development | Removal of fly-over: likely to be positive in landscape & visual terms New development: L&V impact (positive or negative) depends on type, height and design of development | LVIA for new development proposals to assess any new development in the context of the existing landscape / townscape context LVIA should inform height, bulk and design of new development Key views (local and distant) should be assessed in detail |

Conclusion:

Different parts of the development are expected to have different degrees of impact.

The alternative cross-town route is unlikely to raise major landscape & visual issues as the use and the road network are already established. Any potential adverse impacts, e.g. through the loss of trees in the public realm might be able to be compensated through new planting.

The removal of the flyover is likely to have a positive effect in landscape & visual terms as it will increase the visual and physical connectivity between the old and the new town centre.

The re-development on and near the fly-over could have a beneficial or an adverse impact depending on layout, height and design.

A full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) should be carried out, the findings of which should inform the layout and design of the development.