

**Meeting date:** 6 October 2022

**Report to:** Full Cabinet



**Subject/report title:** Solihull Connected Refresh – Draft Transport Strategy

**Report from:** Perry Wardle – Assistant Director, Growth & Development

**Report author/lead contact officer:** David Balme – Senior Transport Planner

**Wards affected:**

- All Wards |  Bickenhill |  Blythe |  Castle Bromwich |  Chelmsley Wood |  
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath |  Elmdon |  Kingshurst/Fordbridge |  Knowle |  
 Lyndon |  Meriden |  Olton |  Shirley East |  Shirley South |  
 Shirley West |  Silhill |  Smith's Wood |  St Alphege

**Public/private report:** Public

**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:** N/A

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the refresh of the Solihull Connected transport strategy, and to seek Cabinet approval to carry out public consultation on the draft document.

**2. Decision(s) recommended**

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to:
- a) Approve commencement of consultation on the Draft Transport Strategy, and supporting documentation, in accordance with the approach set out in paragraphs 3.37 to 3.41 of this report.
  - b) Delegate authority to the Director of Economy and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any necessary changes to the Draft Strategy, and / or supporting documentation, prior to commencement of the consultation.

**3. Matters for Consideration**

- 3.1 The Council's current transport strategy, Solihull Connected, was adopted in 2016. Although it may seem like the strategy was adopted relatively recently, much has changed in the last six years. The way in which people travel, and the reasons for

travelling, are likely to have shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, an increasing focus is being placed upon accelerating uptake of public transport and active travel modes (particularly for short, frequent journeys) due to various environmental, economic and societal factors. The principles, objectives and structure of the adopted strategy remain valid within the context of recently issued advice and guidance; however, a 'refresh' is considered to be required to ensure that appropriate emphasis is given to such modes of travel within the document.

- 3.2 In September 2021, Economic Development and Managed Growth (EDMG) Scrutiny Board considered the initial thinking behind the approach to updating the transport strategy for the borough. That report outlined the themes that would influence the new strategy, the work that had been commissioned looking at public transport and access to local centres along with the work completed on electric vehicles, cycling and walking.
- 3.3 A draft version of the new Solihull Connected transport strategy was subsequently considered by EDMG Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 13 September 2022. Due to the short period of time available between the Scrutiny Board meeting and this Cabinet meeting, the same draft version of Solihull Connected is appended to this report. However, recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board will be taken into account prior to publishing the draft strategy for consultation. A summary of Scrutiny Board recommendations for consideration is set out within this report at paragraph 3.36.
- 3.4 At the same time as refreshing the Council's transport strategy, Transport for West Midlands is refreshing the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP). It will set out aims and a vision, thereby establishing a universal framework for the strategic case/rationale for any transport policy. The Council's draft transport strategy covers a number of similar areas and reflects similar concerns around helping people to access opportunities, making communities safer places to be and reducing carbon consumption.
- 3.5 This has informed the development of the vision and four objectives for Solihull Connected, and these are set out below:
- 3.5.1 Vision: Solihull will have a multi-modal transport system that accesses all parts of the borough, supports our economy, is safe to use and makes the borough healthier and fairer for communities, businesses and visitors.
- 3.5.2 Objectives:
- i) To make the transport network reach all parts of our borough.
  - ii) To help the economy grow in a way that is equal and fair for everyone.
  - iii) To be safe and secure for all users.
  - iv) Transport will contribute to improving the quality of life in our borough
- 3.6 Themes: After consideration and the comments made by the Scrutiny Board in September 2021, the following themes are proposed. Paragraphs 3.7 to 3.10 cover the rationale for this.
- i) To take account of the progress since the first Solihull Connected transport strategy was adopted in 2016.

- ii) To respond to the environmental and transport challenges facing the borough.
- iii) To support the housing and economic plans for the borough.
- iv) To provide clarity as a number of high-profile schemes take place in the borough.

3.7 The period since 2016 has been busy, with progress made across a number of schemes and programmes, which will help support economic growth and improved connectivity for the borough.

3.8 There are a number of transport challenges facing residents and businesses within, and visitors to, Solihull:

- The impacts of COVID-19 and the changes to people's lifestyles and travel patterns that have taken place.
- The population of the borough is ageing, creating challenges such as provision of transport services to healthcare facilities, making public transport more convenient for older people, encouraging greater active travel amongst older people, planning for having older drivers on our roads and providing people in the rural east of the borough sufficient access to public transport.
- To address Climate Change the UK has pledged to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions to net zero by 2050. Net zero means a country takes as much of these climate-changing gases out of the atmosphere as it puts in.
- When HS2 opens, the new Interchange station will place Solihull at the focal point of the High Speed rail network. HS2 will have positive impacts on the economy of Solihull but the new station, and resultant accelerated growth across the borough, will bring new travel demands into Solihull and accentuate the need for improved cross-borough transport to realise opportunities for Solihull residents and businesses.
- The UK is entering a period of greater economic uncertainty, which may lead to a rise in unemployment. As a result, impacts could be felt on travel and transport and, critically, government funding to support transport.
- The 2022 Levelling Up White Paper, which aims to reduce regional disparity and promote local growth, and the impact that may have on travel patterns and funding opportunities.
- Transport can also impact upon quality of life due to high levels of exposure to traffic-related air and noise pollution, especially in dense urban areas.

3.9 An updated Transport Strategy is therefore needed for Solihull. The draft Solihull Local Plan establishes the borough as a growing area, setting a housing target of 940 dwellings per year from 2020 to 2037 (on average) and for c52 hectares of employment land to be built over the period. A transport network is needed that will contribute to the borough's economic, environmental and social needs now and in the future, that will connect our communities with the regional centres and provide access to health, education, leisure, employment, retail and tourism services in a safe, reliable, efficient and low carbon manner.

3.10 During the next few years, a number of high-profile schemes will be taking place in the borough and there will be significant ongoing alterations to the transport network to accommodate infrastructure works. There will be construction traffic on the road network and diversions to services. This is already being experienced as HS2

construction takes place.

- 3.11 Parts five, six and seven of Solihull Connected, (Appendix One), cover the proposed draft transport strategy and key policies.
- 3.12 Part five sets out the relationship to other Strategies that have been adopted previously by the Council, or which are produced by partner bodies, such as the Cycling and Walking Strategy, the Road Safety Strategy and the Electric Vehicles Strategy. Partners produce documents such as TfWM, the Airport Surface Access Strategy and the NEC Masterplan. A number of parish councils in the borough produce Neighbourhood Plans. The outputs from these will influence how travel and transport will evolve in the borough
- 3.13 Part six proposes twelve policies, many to give added impetus to work that the Council is already undertaking.
- 3.14 The suggested twelve policies are set out below:
- i) We will work with TfWM and bus operators to expand the scope of the bus network, to ensure it is responsive to the different needs of different groups, such as disabled and elderly travellers.
  - ii) We will work with the West Midlands Rail Executive and other parties to improve rail services and infrastructure in the borough.
  - iii) We will improve transport and travel connections to our town, district and local centres.
  - iv) We will extend our network of cycle infrastructure across the borough, through cycle lanes, other cycle priorities and cycle parking.
  - v) We will focus on highway schemes that address congestion hotspots, address community concerns around traffic impacts, unlock development opportunities and that relieve constraints to economic growth / retention of economic assets.
  - vi) We will ensure that all parts of the borough can access the UKC Hub by bus, rail, cycle or, in future, by the West Midlands Metro.
  - vii) We will work with communities and developers to make best use of Section 106 payments and the Community Infrastructure Levy to lead early investment in the transport network and mitigate the impacts of development in a sustainable manner.
  - viii) During periods of construction works, we will strengthen our approach to managing capacity on the highway network by emphasising information for users on travel and traffic conditions, and making parallel improvements to sustainable travel modes.
  - ix) We will continue work on reducing carbon from transport by promoting low carbon travel, providing access to new forms of travel and supporting efforts by businesses or residents to change to ultra-low emission vehicles
  - x) We will look at the relationship between parking supply and economic success, congestion levels and uptake of active travel modes and public transport.
  - xi) with the freight and logistics industry to understand their needs and ensure the sectors are engaged in our planning processes.
  - xii) We will take an active role in the development of future transport technology and be supportive of new innovations that can improve our transport network.

- 3.15 These policies are consistent with the general direction that the Council and national government has been taking and is a continuation of policies adopted over recent years concerning transport, the environment and the economic development of the borough.
- 3.16 We have commissioned studies which have provided evidence on bus route journey times and frequencies, and highlighting gaps in network provision.
- 3.17 This analysis of the bus network will be used as the basis for a future piece of work, funded from CRSTS, to develop and deliver cross-borough bus links connecting Blythe Valley and Shirley with Solihull town centre and the UKC Hub.
- 3.18 There are infrastructure and bus service gaps within Solihull that are restricting the ability of the bus network to respond to the changing demand for bus travel. As a result, it is difficult to encourage greater use of buses as an alternative to car travel. The policy basis provided by Solihull Connected and funding via CRSTS will enable the Council to promote and deliver improvement.
- 3.19 Similarly, the railway is struggling to redefine its role in a commuting landscape transformed by the pandemic. However, this does present an opportunity to shape the rail network in the West Midlands around the needs of customers, with modern ticketing and timetables that reflect new needs and patterns of work and life.
- 3.20 A Local Centre Accessibility Review has considered the town and local centres identified in Draft Solihull Local Plan policy P19. The review has looked at existing transport issues, such as poor walking routes, existing infrastructure, wider connectivity issues, overall catchment areas and opportunities such as providing additional pedestrian crossing facilities to reduce walking distances or reviewing the servicing arrangements to reduce conflict between people and delivery vehicles.
- 3.21 The next part of Solihull Connected divides the borough into six areas, each of which has a place based strategy specific to transport needs in that area. These are:
- i) UKC Hub
  - ii) North Solihull
  - iii) Rural east
  - iv) Solihull town centre
  - v) Southern fringe
  - vi) Urban core
- 3.22 The UKC Hub is one of the most strategically connected locations in the UK.
- 3.23 To achieve the Solihull Connected objectives, the following approach will be taken to developing access to this area in coming years:
- i) Improving public transport connections from a number of locations.
  - ii) A land use mix and design that encourages walking, cycling and public transport access and interchange within the area.
  - iii) Enhanced and new cycle and pedestrian links to connect with the wider Borough.
  - iv) Developing a high quality public transport interchange.

- v) Making improvements to highways to accommodate access by car.
- vi) Work with HS2 on plans for Stonebridge Island to accommodate new traffic generated by the HS2 Interchange station.
- vii) Seeking a permanent route for connected autonomous vehicles.

3.24 North Solihull includes a number of residential areas, is home to 28% of the population of the borough and has a younger population profile than other areas of the borough. Other than Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre, this area is not well connected to other parts of the borough.

3.25 To achieve the Solihull Connected objectives, the following approach will be taken to developing access to this area of the borough in coming years:

- i) Improving public transport connectivity to Solihull town centre and UK Central Hub.
- ii) Finding ways to improve access to local centres to make them more accessible and raising their profile.
- iii) Putting a greater focus on providing safe and attractive cycle links.
- iv) Putting a greater focus on improving local streets and reducing severance from busy roads so that residents are encouraged to walk and cycle and are happy to let their children do so.
- v) Addressing concerns around personal safety so that people of all groups feel safe using car parks, cycle parking, walking around local centres and using public transport.

3.26 The rural east of the borough is associated with agriculture and broken by small villages such as Balsall Common and Berkswell. The area is green belt and, being in close proximity to high earning employment opportunities in Birmingham, Coventry, the University of Warwick and Warwickshire, makes this an attractive place to live. The construction of both HS2 and the M42 junction at Catherine-de-Barnes will create a significant amount of construction traffic in the medium term.

3.27 To achieve the Solihull Connected objectives, the following approach will be taken to developing access to this area of the borough in coming years:

- i) Taking steps to ensure that the impacts of traffic and speeds in villages are considered and treated appropriately.
- ii) Working with partners to ensure that there is sufficient capacity at rail station Park & Ride facilities to provide this area with a viable option to driving to work.
- iii) Putting a greater focus on improving local streets and reducing severance from busy roads so that people are encouraged to walk and cycle and are happy to let their children do so.
- iv) Finding ways to make bus and rail services more appropriate to the needs of this area.
- v) Developing the Balsall Common transport package (relief road plus complementary village centre public realm, pedestrian and cycle improvements) to remove the A452 traffic from the centre of the village and to access new housing sites on Barratt's Farm.
- vi) Improving cycle connectivity with urban Solihull, Coventry and Warwickshire in line with our LCWIP.
- vii) Extending the number of electric vehicle charging points in this area.

- 3.28 Solihull town centre is the commercial and core area of Solihull. The town centre is traditionally associated with retail and shopping and has two shopping centres and large department stores. Solihull town centre is also the centre of communications with public transport hubs such as the railway station.
- 3.29 To achieve the Solihull Connected objectives, the following approach will be taken to developing access to this area of the borough in coming years:
- i) Carrying out research to understand the current and future car parking needs of the town centre and developing a strategy for car parking in the central business district.
  - ii) Continuing to develop the network of bus routes into central Solihull.
  - iii) Continuing to develop proposals for improving Solihull railway station.
  - iv) Improving accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists into and across the centre.
  - v) Improving the public realm within Solihull centre.
  - vi) Adding further electric vehicle charging points
- 3.30 The Southern Fringe area of the borough comprises of a swathe of countryside that is predominantly green belt but which also takes in the Blythe Valley Business Park and a number of villages such as Dickens Heath, Dorridge and Knowle. There are significant plans for new homes and employment in the Southern Fringe. The area has both railway and motorway connections.
- 3.31 To achieve the Solihull Connected objectives, the following approach will be taken to developing access to this area of the borough in coming years:
- i) Improving bus and cycling connections to Blythe Valley Business Park from the wider borough and beyond, as further development occurs.
  - ii) Working with partners to ensure that there is sufficient capacity at rail station Park & Ride facilities to provide this area with a viable option to driving to work.
  - iii) Putting a greater focus on improving local streets and reducing severance from busy roads so that people are encouraged to walk and cycle and are happy to let their children do so.
  - iv) Finding ways to improve access to our local centres to make these centres more accessible and raising their profile.
  - v) Improving public transport connectivity to Solihull Town Centre and the central area of the Borough.
  - vi) Adding further electric vehicle charging points to the area.
  - vii) Seeking a permanent route for connected autonomous vehicles.
- 3.32 The Urban Core represents the major residential areas of the west of Solihull Borough. Around half of the people who live in the Borough live in these areas and the A34 Stratford Road corridor represents a major retail and employment area. The area is well served in terms of amenities and transport links and the growth plans for the Borough could see 8,000 more people and 6,000 more jobs by 2031.
- 3.33 To achieve the Solihull Connected objectives, the following approach will be taken to developing access to this area of the borough in coming years:

- i) Changing the perception of public transport to make it more popular and to form an attractive alternative to car travel.
- ii) Providing improved accessibility to Olton and Shirley railway stations by cycle to enable commuters to get into the rail system quicker and easier.
- iii) Taking advantage of the latent demand for cycling from the resident population who already own and use bikes for leisure purposes. Provide a network of cycle facilities which lie along peak demand lines for commuting purposes but also connect parks and rural areas; taking advantage of the 'green lungs' of the Borough.
- iv) Putting a greater focus on improving local streets and reducing severance from busy roads so that people are encouraged to walk and cycle and are happy to let their children do so.
- v) Finding ways to improve access to Shirley and Stratford Road shopping along with other local centres in the urban core of the borough, by sustainable travel modes, to make these centres more accessible and reduce carbon use.
- vi) Adding further electric vehicle charging points to the area.

3.34 These strategy approaches are relevant to the areas concerned and in line with wider proposals for, and the needs of, the areas.

3.35 Overall, the draft transport strategy is considered to be in line with national government views and existing Council policy. The document provides a series of policies designed to steer and focus improvement to transport within the borough and sets out proposed strategies designed for the six areas of the borough that account for local transport characteristics.

### **Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board – 13 September 2022**

3.36 At its meeting of 13 September 2022, the EDMG Scrutiny Board provided a number of recommendations to take into account prior to publishing the Draft Solihull Connected transport strategy for public consultation. Formal minutes of the meeting are not yet available, but a summary of recommendations noted by Officers at the meeting is presented below:

- Bolster references, where relevant, to the human / social / cultural aspects of people's accessibility; accessibility does not relate solely to the implementation of physical infrastructure. Terminology / language within the document should be 'people-first'.
- Greater consideration needs to be given to the role that taxis and private hire vehicles can play within an integrated borough-wide transport network.
- The Council's view on trams should be clear within the strategy, and clarity provided on terminology (as trams within the West Midlands are usually known as 'Metro').
- Public transport and active travel networks should be optimised and integrated, with consideration given to frequency and timings of public transport services.



- Improvements are required to access to, and facilities at, a number of railway stations across the borough.
- Real-time information available at bus stops should be enhanced and rolled out more widely.
- Expectations for electric vehicle charging should be clear across all parts of the borough.

## **Public Consultation**

- 3.37 Conducting widespread and meaningful public consultation was a crucial element in the development of the original transport strategy. It will play an equally important role in this latest update, ensuring appropriate understanding and buy-in from Solihull residents, road users and other key stakeholders.
- 3.38 Consultation material will be shared and promoted via a range of channels including the Council's website and the 'Solihull Connected' email bulletin, which currently has 10,235 self-selected subscribers interested in 'transport' topics. Local media coverage will be generated through a series of proactive press releases and planned consultation activity will be promoted on social media and through the use of physical signage at key locations.
- 3.39 The online element of the consultation will be delivered using a new software platform 'Your Voice Solihull' which is aligned to the Council's existing Stay Connected email bulletin service and will allow real-time access to community input across multiple channels.
- 3.40 A series of public exhibitions will also be organised across the borough, which will provide members of the public with the opportunity to meet face-to-face with project officers to ask questions and give feedback. These sessions will also be supplemented by a series of online webinars hosted via GoToWebinar. In line with other consultation activity, where appropriate or requested, paper copies of the consultation materials and response forms will be made available.
- 3.41 It is proposed that public consultation on the Draft Solihull Connected transport strategy be undertaken for 6 weeks, commencing in January 2023. In addition to the draft strategy document, the material made available as part of the consultation will include the Solihull Connected Delivery Plan and supporting evidence, e.g Public Transport Vision and Town, District and Local Town Centre Access Strategies.

## **4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

- 4.1 This report highlights the recent shift in national policy regarding the way in which transport is treated, and how transport networks should be planned and designed. Three options have therefore been considered to ensure that the Council has a transport strategy that fully reflects current policy:
- a) Do nothing. i.e. retain Solihull Connected in its current form;

- b) Review the existing Solihull Connected transport strategy and update or refresh where applicable; and
- c) Develop an entirely new strategy.

- 4.2 The decision to ‘do nothing’ was discounted. The recent changes in national policy with respect to active travel and public transport, along with national focus on reducing carbon emissions must be taken into account in any transport strategy adopted by the Council, and it was felt that the 2016 strategy did not do these topics sufficient justice.
- 4.3 The option to develop an entirely new strategy was also considered and discounted on the basis that the principles and approach of the adopted 2016 Solihull Connected strategy remain valid, as discussed in part three of this report.

**5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

- 5.1 Development of a ‘refreshed’ Solihull Connected remains the preferred option, as the principles, objectives and structure of the current document remain valid within the context of recently issued advice and guidance.
- 5.2 The adopted 2016 Solihull Connected provides a transport strategy that acknowledges the importance of providing a more balanced multi-modal approach to movement. However, increased emphasis needs to be given within the document towards the promotion and priority of active travel and public transport modes; which will be delivered through the development of a Public Transport Vision and greater embedding of the principles of the recently adopted Cycling & Walking Strategy.
- 5.3 Solihull Connected 2016 also highlights that a different approach should be taken to policy and infrastructure delivery in different areas of the borough, to consider the variation in demography and geography across Solihull. It currently includes six area strategies. The principle of having area strategies that are tailored to different parts of the borough is still considered to be sound; however, it is proposed that these area strategies be complemented by Town / Local Centre Access Strategies, which will translate the policy and principles of access into specific measures for implementation in such centres.

**6. Implications and Considerations**

- 6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revitalising our towns and local centres.</li> <li>2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2.</li> <li>3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing.</li> </ol>	<p>Directly relating to supporting our towns and local centres by improving access to health, education, leisure, employment, retail and tourism sites within the borough. Bringing improved access will support steps to revive the economy from the pandemic. Supporting the benefits of HS2 and UK Central development plans through ensuring that people are able to travel</p>

	reliably and efficiently to the new services and the new employment sites within UK Central.
<p>Environment:</p> <p>4. Enhance Solihull's natural environment.</p> <p>5. Improve Solihull's air quality.</p> <p>6. Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions.</p>	<p>A sustainable transport strategy with local involvement will mean greater choice to people and businesses in our borough when making travel decisions. Additional use of public transport or active travel modes will ease pollution generated by road based travel.</p> <p>Improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions through encouraging residents and visitors to travel by public transport or active travel modes rather than private car. An improved network delivers greater choice to people and businesses in our borough.</p>
<p>People and Communities:</p> <p>7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>8. Enable communities to thrive.</p> <p>9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults &amp; children with complex needs.</p>	<p>The aim is a transport strategy that is responsive to people's needs and which will better serve our residents strengthening connectivity and accessibility in the Solihull Borough area and to surrounding areas. This will enable communities to thrive and allow people without cars or who are unable to drive to better access services and opportunities.</p>

## 6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

- 6.2.1 Economic Development & Managed Growth Scrutiny Board has twice provided input into the development of the 'refreshed' borough-wide transport strategy, through its meetings in the Septembers of 2021 and 2022, as summarised within the main body to this report.
- 6.2.2 Approval from Cabinet is now sought to commence public consultation on the draft transport strategy. The aim of the public consultation is to gain a better understanding of what residents, visitors, businesses and members of the public feel is important in delivering a transport network that meets future environmental and travel requirements.

## 6.3 Financial implications:

- 6.3.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.

## 6.4 Legal implications:

- 6.4.1 There are no legal implications as a direct result of this report.

## 6.5 Risk implications:

6.5.1 The Corporate Risk Management approach has been complied with, to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision. For example, legislation, political and reputational risks.

6.5.2 There is a risk that not having a 'current' transport strategy leaves the Council in a weaker position when bidding for funding, lobbying decision makers, when working with developers or seeking to influence major players in the transport field, such as Highways England, Midlands Connect or Network Rail.

## 6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 None as a consequence of this report. Equality has been and will continue to be considered throughout development of the strategy, with a Fair Treatment Assessment to be conducted in due course.

## **7. List of appendices referred to**

7.1 Draft Solihull Connected transport strategy, including the associated Draft Delivery Plan.

## **8. Background papers used to compile this report**

8.1 None.

## **9. List of other relevant documents**

9.1 Solihull Connected transport strategy, 2016 and Delivery Plan 2016..