

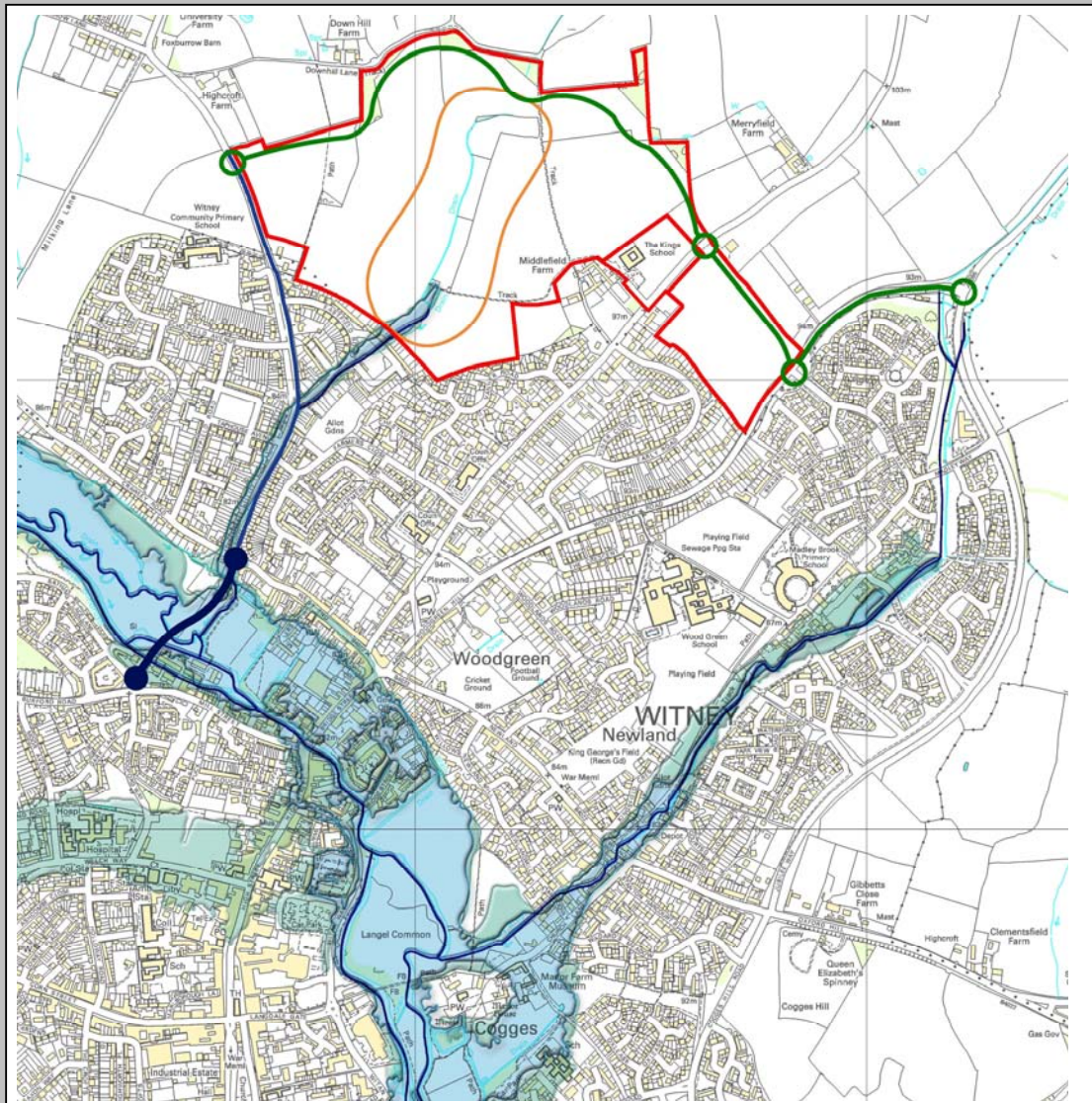
North Witney

March 2012

A Statement of Commitment

Prepared for Members of West Oxfordshire District Council

By **Meridian** Strategic Land Ltd



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Introduction

Previously, Meridian has outlined how we believe the development of this land at north Witney can provide major benefits for the town itself and deliver much needed new housing. In this document we seek to describe the main issues as we see them in greater detail. We also say something about a very high quality design vision for the project, and we introduce our view that there is an opportunity here to do something unusual in new neighbourhood design.

The three major community infrastructure benefits for Witney that would come from this development, are: The New River Windrush Crossing, the West End link highways improvements and the flooding alleviation measures.

There is also another important issue that should be considered. We feel that a northern “spine” road performing a “link” function from Hailey Road to Woodstock Road via the proposed development link over New Yatt Road, could be part of the design. This would be capable of performing a relief function for northern Witney traffic with some offsite highway improvements on the northern end of Woodstock Rd.

The unusual design concept is facilitated by the large area right in the centre of the development that will be required for the “Cascade”, floodwater storage volume. This could be put to innovative and imaginative use by plunging landscape themes from it, into the main development areas from a central parkland setting, and by setting buildings and commercial and community activities, within, or on the edge of, the park. (This is one view, subsequent consultations with officers, members and the public might dictate something different.)

The New River Windrush Bridge

Our engineers have worked throughout last summer to design and cost a new bridge. They were given a very specific brief. The bridge had to be:

- A “structural only” design at this stage, so that the design didn’t dictate the final appearance of the bridge, and a design to which local vernacular or other aesthetics could be applied or clad, so that local people get a bridge that looks as they want it to look.
- Capable of being funded by the proposed development.
- Deliverable within the early years of a possible enabling development at North Witney.



The Draft West Oxfordshire Core Strategy of January 2011 safe guards land for a new link across the River Windrush. West Oxfordshire District Council has had the proposal under consideration since 1991, but until now, no-one has been able to say that it was definitely possible. This has now represented over 20 years of worsening traffic problems for the town.

The WEL, or West End Link, is the entire route, including highway improvement and the new bridge. The current restraints caused by the bottle-neck of the existing single bridge linking the two halves of Witney, are such that the new crossing is now proposed as part of Meridian’s promotion of land at North Witney for development. The bridge has now been designed and costed and the offsite road improvements surveyed and designed.

The WEL as proposed will provide an 8.3m wide carriageway consisting of two 3.65m running lanes with a 0.5m wide hardstrip. Beyond this are a 3m footway cycleway to one side to allow pedestrian and cycle use, and 1.0m hard verge for drivers to use in a vehicle breakdown to pull partly off the road. This scale of provision is adequate for the proposed use.

The choice to provide a multi span bridge rather than pipes or arches, is in order to avoid large obstructions across the floodplain in the centre of Witney which might reduce flood conveyance. There is also no doubt that a multi span bridge could also provide less intrusion on the flood plain throughout the construction process, by being completed in small parts, rather than in the large sections that other designs would require.

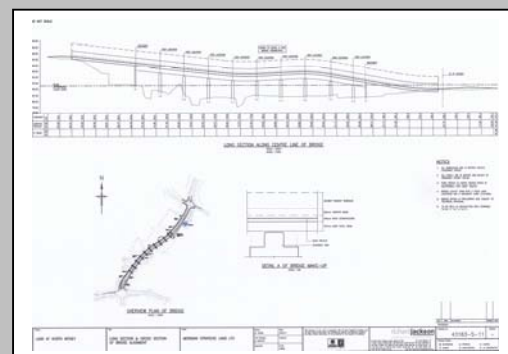
The bridge has been designed within the land area safeguarded in the Draft Core Strategy. The provision of the bridge includes for extended abutments from the south to the edge of the floodplain on the southern side of the river, with a new traffic signal layout for four arms at the southern end at the junction with Burford Road. The new approach from the north will include a traffic signal layout and also new abutment construction across the beginning of the floodplain to a point just south of the existing builder’s yard. This will allow the bridge and these approach areas to be filled and clad in aesthetically pleasing design and materials, and will also reduce the number of spans of the bridge.

The central section has ten spans. The bridge deck will be of steel beam construction approximately 770mm high with a concrete deck and asphalt road surface. Access to all of the bridge pier tops and abutments for safety inspections are shown on the bridge construction drawings that have been deposited with your officers.

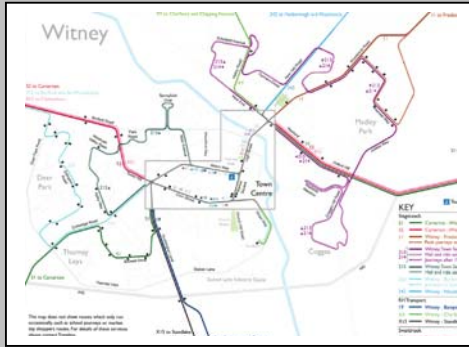
The provision of the 1m hardstrip described earlier will also allow for the new rising main to cross the river from the proposed development to the foul water pumping station on the southern side of Witney.

Overall the bridge has been designed to limit its impact and visual intrusion but this aspect will ultimately be subject to the views of local decision makers/stakeholders.

If the North Witney development is allocated, Meridian is committed to getting this bridge built.



The West End Link Highways Improvements



During last summer, Meridian's contractors carried out extensive traffic counts at many locations around the roads of Witney, as required by our engineers and Oxfordshire County Highways.

From this information, and using standard traffic modelling techniques, an extensive programme of highway improvements has been designed to ensure increased road capacity around Witney, in conjunction with the new bridge, to alleviate traffic congestion in the north of Witney and facilitate free flowing traffic movements right across the town.

A Transportation study was commissioned. It was completed in September 2011. The Hierarchy of modes of transport considered were, walking, cycling, public transport usage, and then the private car.

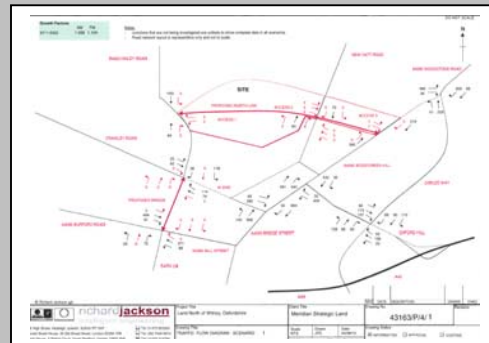
The site is approximately 1.8km from the town centre and there are convenient local facilities such as schools, employment areas, recreation and shopping within much shorter walking distances. Moreover, all local types of facility are within easy cycling distance of the site making it a very sustainable development location.

In terms of public transport, the numbers 213 and 214 buses run in clockwise and counter clockwise directions close to the site at the rate of 6 per day from Monday to Saturday. It is proposed that buses are increased in frequency to one every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, and hourly on Sundays. This will provide a good alternative to car use.

Major road junctions that were assessed included:

Woodstock Road and Jubilee Way.

Junction upgrade required. A 40m ICD roundabout is proposed which will provide the necessary increase in capacity.



Oxford Hill and Jubilee Way.

The study has shown that even with the development traffic growth in the future there is no major impact on this junction and so it will continue to work within capacity with no improvement.

Bridge Street and West End.

The two existing mini roundabouts on Bridge Street were assessed on the basis that with the new link road between Woodstock Road Hailey Road operational, the diverted traffic would not go through the town, thus relieving traffic numbers in Bridge Street.

Hailey Road and West End.

At present this junction operates within capacity. However, it is clear that the increased traffic flows in the north/south direction, will necessitate an improvement to a traffic signalled junction. This would better regulate flows and will accommodate the growth from the development and background traffic figures for the years to 2022 and beyond.

Burford Road and Mill Street.

The existing traffic signalled junction would need to be changed from three arm to four arm to accommodate flows from the bridge and to ensure adequate capacity from all directions with the additional traffic from the development, a two lane approach will be required from Burford Road (west) and from the bridge.

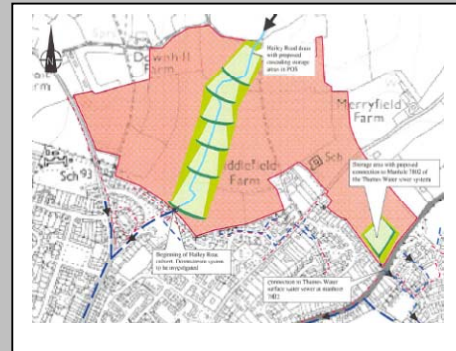
If the North Witney development is allocated, Meridian is committed to improving traffic flows around Witney.

Flood Attenuation and Alleviation Measures

As part of the consideration of the proposed development, it was emphasised that the potential for flooding and flood risk has been an issue in Witney for many years. This is highlighted in both the 2007 and 2008 reviews reported by the District Council and the Environment agency. As a consequence, a strategy has been considered for the attenuation of surface water run off from the land to the north of Witney.

As part of the series of mitigation measures to prevent flooding in Witney in the future, the two previous studies proposed flood water storage on land to the north of Witney. The development of the proposal site would be treated as two separate areas. These are, part A, to the west of New Yatt Road, and, part B to the East of the road.

In the assessment of part A, the catchment area of the Hailey Road culvert has been analysed and, in addition, future surface water run-off from the proposed development has been included.



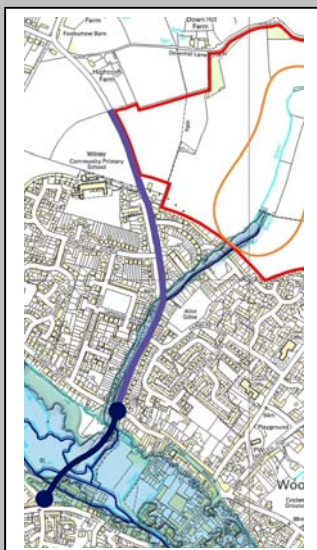
Added together these have provided a flow rate for run off to calculate the potential for mitigation of future flooding downstream. In summary, the Hailey Road stream culvert is too small, at only around two thirds of the capacity required. This means that a series of mitigation measures are required to store surface water in a cascade system on the site taking up approximately 6 hectares in order to limit the discharge flow rate from the land to the drain downstream of the culvert.

These measures would reduce the flow rate to approximately 475 litres per second in comparison to the existing rate of 2,350 litres per second for the 1 in 100 year storm event. The flows are therefore greatly reduced, mitigating the risk of flooding downstream.

Part B of the strategy deals with the east of the site current flowing into the Madly Brook area and presently discharging at around 279 litres per second for the 1 in 100 year flood event plus climate change. The storage area here would need to be just over half a hectare (5,500m²) and would reduce the potential flows to around 124 litres per second, thus reducing the flow rate by around 55%.

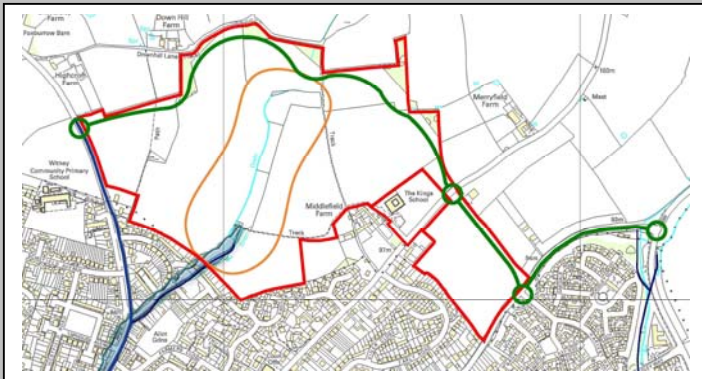
By completing the assessment it is clear that the existing discharge points have limited capacity, and high rainfall events cause flooding which cannot be removed quickly enough from the land surface. The

proposals designed and recommended by our engineers for attenuation on the proposal site will provide a limit to the discharge from the existing catchment as well as the proposed development. This will provide for a better attenuated flow rate, and mitigate against flooding downstream, within Witney itself. It is therefore concluded that a scheme to provide surface water mitigation can be accommodated on site and delivered within the area and will benefit not only the development, but existing Witney residents also.



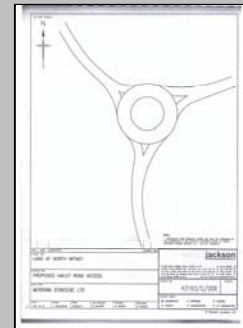
If the North Witney development is allocated, Meridian is committed to constructing the flooding mitigation measures necessary to protect the existing areas as well as the new development.

The Northern Link Road?

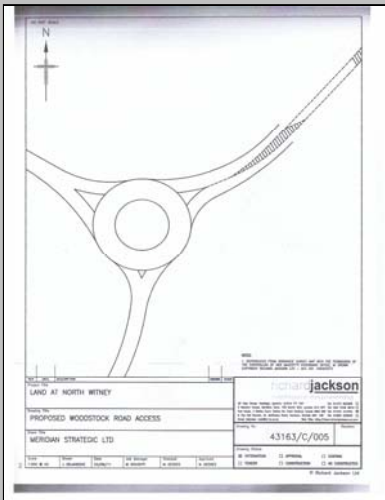


It came to our attention quite recently, that there might be a focus of opinion among some Councillors, that if WODC were to be minded to allocate the land at North Witney for housing development, then this might be an opportune moment to revisit the question of the

once mooted northern link road. During the preparation of our off-site highways evidence, it was necessary to investigate and design points of access and junction arrangements that would stand the test of time in keeping traffic flows moving for many years into the future. At the same time, we also produced junction designs for the Woodstock Road / Jubilee Way junction that could potentially form the eastern end of a route specifically designed to relieve pressure in the north of the town. The western access roundabout is something we have also already designed but is an on-site construction, and so is the Woodstock Road roundabout.

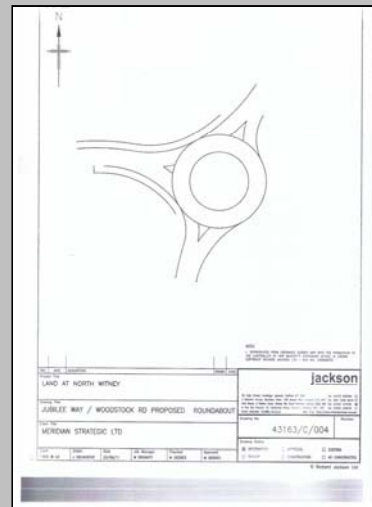


This all means that together with a new design for a roundabout at New Yatt Road, a link road route could all be constructed on land either already under the control of the applicants, or already in Highways ownership.



Of course, there is currently no evidence at this stage that either WODC or OCC are keen on this idea, and, for this reason we can only make the point, that, should it be regarded as desirable, Meridian would certainly be prepared to investigate the possibility and design challenges of such a scheme.

It appears that the question would be one of design issues around traffic calming rather than straight-through fast relief type roads.



If West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council were minded to allocate the land to the north of Witney for housing development, Meridian will commit to investigating the potential and desire among the Councils for a new north Witney link road.

The Controlling Interests

When Meridian first came into this project, we were told that the site had been promoted for many years and had received much favourable support from many members of WODC over those years. However, after speaking to a great many people interested in this project, and meeting with your various officers, it has become very clear to us that the reason for not allocating this site previously has been primarily because no one person or organisation has ever been able to demonstrate that it could be delivered. For sure there have probably been many other reasons given during the production of various past local plans, but in essence, it appears to be as simply as: the development with its planning gain package couldn't be shown to be deliverable.

There appears to be no doubt that the planning gain package would be extremely welcome, but no one has previously shown that it was technically feasible to construct and deliver. In addition, the package has never been properly costed before. This has meant that your officers were unable to tell you if it were financial viable. To compound the problem, there does not appear to have been a reliable agreement between all of the controlling interest (land owners and option holders) to ensure that all of the various elements of land, for access, drainage, the bridge works, etc, could definitely be provided on time, at the right locations and freely, in order to facilitate the development.

Now however, this can be done. Meridian has obtained agreement with all parties, the landowners, the option holders, and the developers. We are currently progressing legal agreements through our lawyers covering 6 different contracts and have provided your officers, not only with details of these arrangements, but also with signed heads of terms which cover all of the necessary land on the development site. Meridian has secured the funding to deliver this scheme via the resources of the major Funding and Asset Management firm, Aberdeen Asset Management. Meridian and Aberdeen Asset Management will together make this scheme happen and not only to a superb level of design, but also provide the resources to deliver the full planning gain package.

We feel that this location, in this town, deserves an exemplary level of design, and would advocate that the planning permission granted be subject to design code practice in order to preserve and guarantee the final high quality of the project. We also have a vision for the overall treatment of the development to emanate from the extensive central parkland feature already dictated by the need for the cascade surface water storage system. If such a large area of public parkland/open space is going to be available anyway, then why not use it to theme the development, creating "fingers" of complimentary planting and landscaping which will wind their way throughout the residential areas? Much more could be said about this but this is not the appropriate forum.

We can deliver this scheme as early as WODC wants to see it begin, because, as we have already demonstrated, we will put in the resources to do so.

If West Oxfordshire District Council allocates this site for housing development (1,500 dwellings) and associated uses, Meridian will ensure that it is delivered in its entirety, on time, and to the high standard of design that Witney deserves.

Meridian Strategic Land

Making Land Work