

March Transport Strategy

Introduction

This is the March Transport Strategy. It forms part of the Local Transport Plan and has been driven by March residents, stakeholders and interest groups as well as those who work in and visit the town.

The strategy has been formulated following extensive consultation both to identify that the schemes contained within it are appropriate and to produce a priority order for their implementation. The aim of the strategy is to provide a programme of integrated transport initiatives up until the year 2006 that support the Local Transport Plan objectives and contribute towards the prosperity and well-being of the town.

Background

Situated in the heart of Fenland District, March is the second largest of the four Fenland Market Towns with a population in excess of 18,000. In recent years, the town has experienced considerable population growth, with a 12% increase between 1991 and 2000. The number of dwellings in March has risen by 11% over the same period. Currently the majority of residential areas are within 1.5 km of the town centre.

March is one of the main weekly shopping centres in the district. As an addition to the town centre, the March trading estate, with its direct access to the primary highway network, provides a further diverse element to the town.

To support the economic vitality of March and enhance the environment, it is important that transport and access to and within the town are improved. There are a number of key transport issues that the strategy will address by providing specific schemes and measures for implementation.

Transport Issues

March is currently provided with a range of transport services. In terms of public transport, the town has rail connections to Peterborough, Cambridge and beyond with services operating on at least hourly frequencies. Bus services are also provided approximately hourly to Whittlesey and Wisbech, but less frequent to Ely and Huntingdon. There is a 2-hourly service to Cambridge and a daily service to Peterborough. Town bus services run at half-hour frequency throughout much of the working day. Services to villages are generally infrequent and some settlements are served only by market day services. The Fenland Association for Community Transport (FACT) operates a number of rural community transport services to and from the town.

In terms of roads, March is relatively well connected to the national road network. It has a western bypass, but nothing to the east although this has been considered and discounted in the past. Provision for cycling in the town is not good although the town is relatively flat and compact, potentially making it ideal for cycling. The maximum cycling distance in any direction is about 3 km, or about 20 minutes at a steady 10 kph. On this basis, a higher level of cycling than the 3% currently observed could be expected.

There is significant potential to improve transport in March through this strategy. The elements of the strategy detailed below will achieve this by addressing the key transport problems affecting the town, including:

- the rural nature of the surrounding area, which means that there is a significant reliance on the private car for transport

- there is a significant amount of commuting to and from the town, with 82% of people travelling in and out of March doing so by car
- most of the major employers are in locations to the north of March, which are poorly served by public transport
- many roads in March are busy and there are few off-street cycle routes
- the road accident rate in March is higher than in most other Market Towns in Cambridgeshire
- the town centre has only one road bridge crossing the river at Broad Street. This causes congestion in the centre, which is worsened by the road layout forcing lorries wishing to access the industrial estates from the north to go through the centre of the town. Broad Street is the retail centre of the town and congestion in this area could ultimately prove detrimental to its economic vitality
- there is limited parking for cars and cycles in the town centre
- the footways are narrow, with most of the highway dedicated to carriageway in the town centre.

Aims of the strategy

The March Transport Strategy aims to be a comprehensive and integrated transport strategy and has at its core, three fundamental objectives drawn from the Local Transport Plan, namely to:

- make travel safer
- promote integrated and sustainable transport
- manage effective transport networks

In addressing these, the strategy aims to contribute towards the economic vitality and viability of the town. It will also contribute towards achieving the Local Transport Plan targets for reducing the number of accidents and stabilising traffic levels, and will address wider objectives such as reducing social exclusion and promoting health.

The following sections outline the schemes that form the March Transport Strategy under the three key Local Transport Plan objectives.

Making Travel Safer

“Road junctions specified in this leaflet for improvement are a must”

Questionnaire response

Road safety in March is a desirable aim in itself. But road safety goes beyond just reducing the number of casualties, important though this is. Safer roads encourage people to use other more sustainable forms of transport than the car and contribute towards making the town more attractive to all users. There have been a few recent site improvements carried out in March specifically to decrease the number and severity of accidents. The most notable involves the Broad Street junction where traffic lights were installed and in 2000 when the staging of the Broad Street lights was modified. These measures have reduced accidents causing injuries at the site by 74%.

To achieve the Local Transport Plan targets there is a need for a more comprehensive range of road safety measures. To this end a number of schemes have been developed. These have been chosen because, taken together, they will have the greatest impact in reducing accidents and will also complement other

initiatives contained within the strategy to promote sustainable transport.

These schemes have been drawn up using a combination of the County Council’s ranking system (which looks at the worst accident spots in the County and grades them accordingly) and a system which examines the costs of the schemes, how quickly they can be delivered and, following consultation, their relative importance to the local community.

Table A8.7 shows the schemes contained in the strategy.

Map A8.8 shows the location of the schemes. Exact details of the schemes will be the subject of further consultation as they are developed.

Promote integrated and sustainable transport

“What you plan has the potential to improve March’s traffic situation very substantially and I welcome it all”

Questionnaire response

Better public transport and walking and cycling facilities lie at the heart of the strategy if the town is to retain its essential character. In this respect, there is a great deal to be done but also a number of opportunities.

- March is relatively small and reasonably flat, but at present the number of people walking and cycling is quite small. Improved infrastructure will help to encourage greater use of walking and cycling.
- The bus services in March are at present limited but adequate for the needs of the town. There is, however, little or no information available as to the services that are operating and the existing shelters need to be upgraded. The strategy provides an opportunity to greatly improve these elements of the service.
- Measures promoting sustainable transport will also benefit the Safer Routes to Schools initiative taking place in two of the schools in the town.

A number of initiatives are proposed as part of this strategy, to capitalise on these opportunities.

Cycling and Walking

“Safer cycle routes for cycling to school are very important and are the key to help reduce traffic congestion”

“The bridge linking Elwyn Road and Nene Parade will be of great benefit”

Questionnaire responses

Cycling and walking represent a key part of the Local Transport Plan’s strategy for sustainable travel and consequently form a major part of the strategy for the Market Towns. Cycling and walking also link to the health agenda because of their contribution to reducing the risk of coronary heart disease.

Cycling and walking have common themes. They are:

- modes of travel that can increase the health of the individual
- non-income dependant mode
- susceptible to considerations of personal safety
- contribute to, and benefit from, traffic reductions

Existing facilities for cyclists within the town consist of some shared use pathways, signage, advanced stop lines in Broad Street and Dartford Road and cycle parking at several locations. Two new pedestrian crossings have been provided as part of the Fens cycle tourism project in Dartford and Wisbech Road. March has a relatively high percentage of pedestrians especially in the Town Centre, with 22% of all journeys across the river and within March made on foot.

In order to further promote cycling and walking there is a need for additional measures to be introduced. To this end a number of schemes have been developed. These have been chosen because they will have the greatest impact in encouraging cycling and walking and promoting sustainable transport. The measures are described in Table A8.9 and shown on Map A8.10.

The cycle improvements will link into and complement the National Cycle Network and the Fenland Countryside Access Project. The primary cycle routes utilise the two existing foot/cycle bridges across the river, located east and west of the main road bridge, and provide alternative safe routes to the busy town road bridge.

Table A8.7 Priorities for safety improvements

Priority	Site	Outline Measures
1	Junction of Burrowmoor Road with High Street	Safety measures, complementing the cycle improvements in this area
2	Junction of St Peter’s Road with High Street and The Causeway	Safety measures, complementing the cycle improvements in this area
3	Broad Street	Link signals at the Broad Street Junction with the Town Bridge and Griffin Pelican crossing
4	High Street	Further pedestrian crossing provision Pavement widening Signing and lining Environmental improvements Pedestrian refuge provision
5	Station Road	Pavement widening On-street parking management Signing and lining Environmental improvements Pedestrian refuge provision
6	Dartford Road	Pedestrian refuges Signing Lining
7	Wisbech Road	Environmental measures

Map A8.8 Location of road safety measures

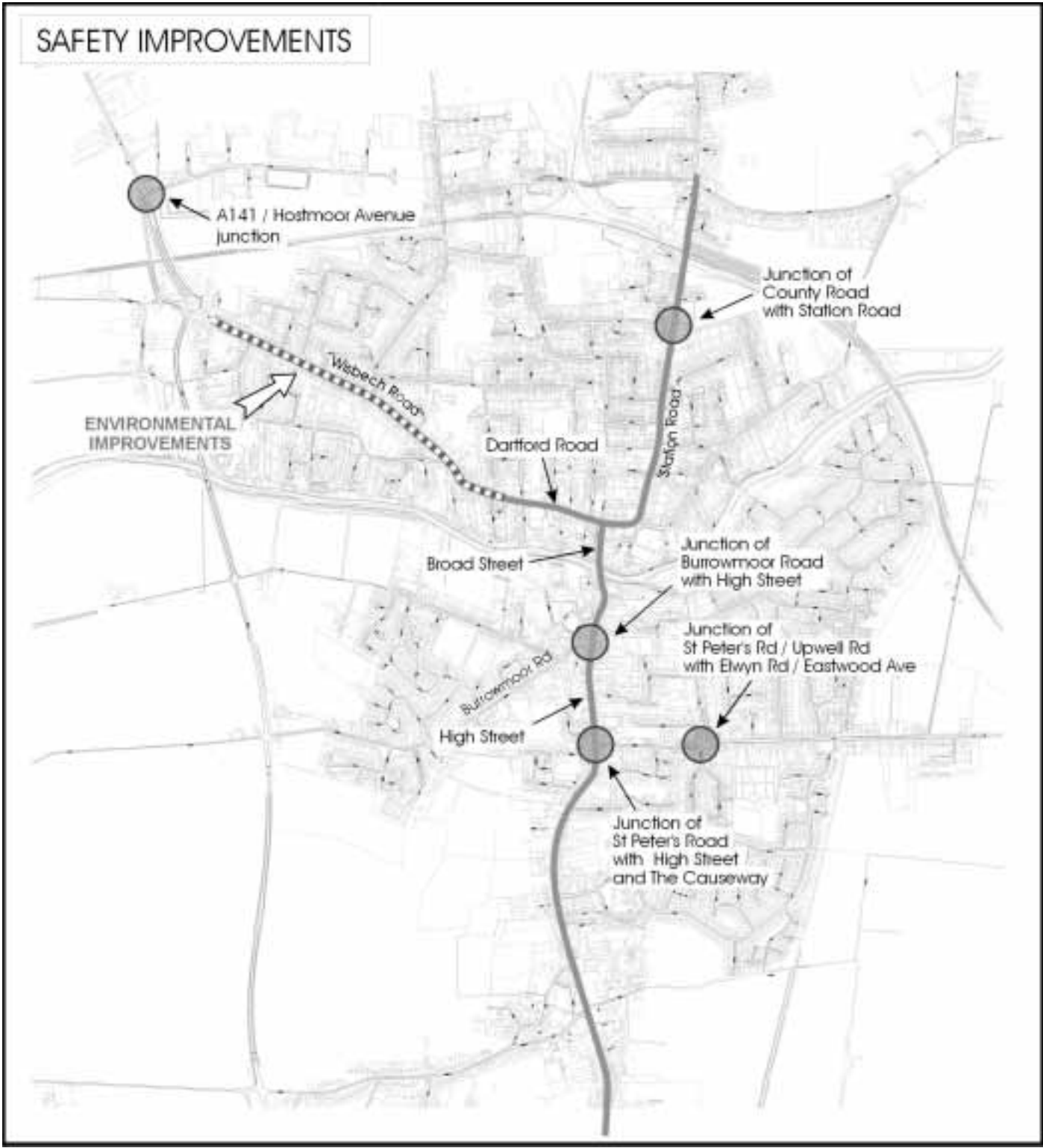


Table A8.9 Priorities for cycling and walking

Priority	Description	Route
CYCLING 1	North-south route on the B1101	Railway Station to Neal Wade Community College via Station Road and High Street
	North-south route west of road river bridge	Norwood Road, Maple Grove, Henson Road/Marylebone Road across the existing river crossing, The Chase, across West End Park, to the Burrowmoor Road junction with the High Street
2	North-south route east of road river bridge providing an alternative to the main road	Sainsbury's to Neal Wade Community College via a new bridge across the river between Elwyn Road and Nene Parade
3	Further enhancements	Station Road to south side of the river using existing bridge via St Johns Road and Wigstones Road Improvements to Nene Parade Burrowmoor Road to Gaul Road and then on to West End Park Cavalry Drive and north towards the river Robin Goodfellows Lane and County Road area
WALKING 1	Pedestrian enhancements in addition to the cycling measures	Improved lighting Improved signage Provision of CCTV Environmental improvements

Table A8.12 Bus improvements

Bus improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active promotion of the services • New infrastructure along selected parts of the route with a programme of new bus shelters and bus build-ups at key stops • Up-to-date, easily understandable timetable information at bus stops in March

Map A8.10 also identifies two new river crossings north of Elwyn Road to Nene Parade and near to the March to Ely railway line. A new bridge across the river north of Elwyn Road would link the south side of March with Sainsbury's supermarket and the north side of March. The other potential river crossing links the south side of March across the new housing development to the railway station and employment area with a new bridge adjacent to the March to Ely Railway Line.

The cycle network also includes some key routes for implementation as high priority. The north-south route on the B1101 from Neale Wade Community College to the Railway Station via Station Road and High Street is a major scheme that will provide significant benefits for pupils, and also residents, cycling between the college and the town centre and the northern residential areas. Further to these significant improvements, the new river crossing north of Elwyn Road linking to Nene Parade will ultimately allow a north-south route away from the busy main roads.

The other north-south route is an important alternative to the main Broad Street/High Street road river crossing also for implementation as a high priority is the route via Norwood Road, Maple Grove, Henson Road/Marylebone Road across the existing river crossing and onto The Chase and to the Burrowmoor Road junction with the High Street.

In addition to the cycling measures above, measures will be introduced to improve lighting, signage and provision of CCTV

along the walking routes described in Table A8.9 shown on Map A8.11.

The cycling and walking measures contained in Table A8.9 have been prioritised to concentrate on introducing key routes that provide the most important links that will encourage cycling and walking within the town.

Public Transport

“The information for the buses is terrible so it definitely needs to be upgraded”

Questionnaire response

Increasing bus travel is a key aim of the Local Transport Plan and the Bus Strategy for Cambridgeshire. For many people, the bus is a vitally important means of transport that contributes towards improving the environment and reducing the need for car travel.

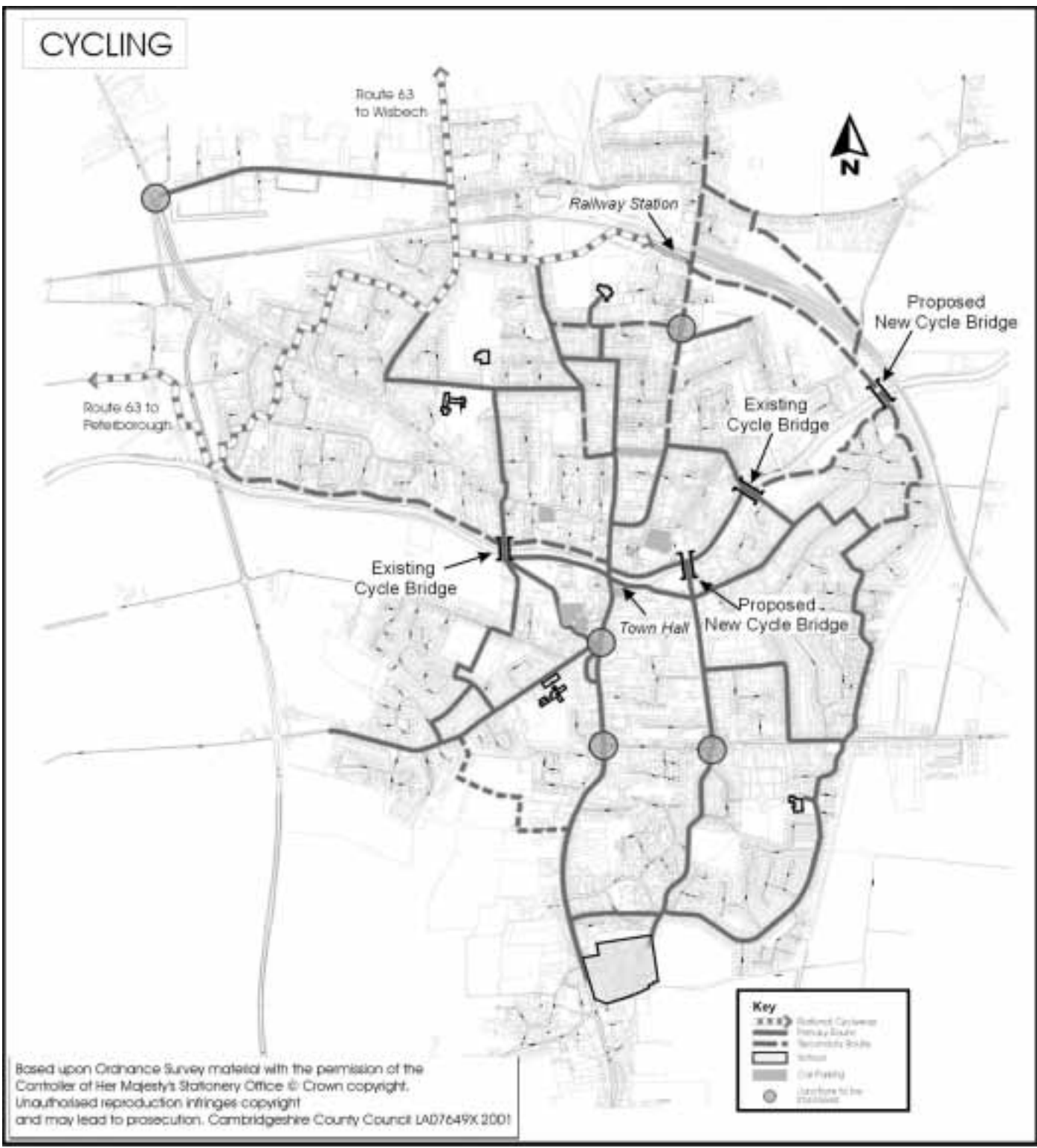
There are opportunities in March to improve the information provided for the existing bus services and to raise the quality of waiting facilities. Experience of marketing services gained through the use of the Rural Bus Grant has shown that this approach can be highly effective in increasing patronage.

The strategy will complement this initiative with the provision of a rolling programme of improved infrastructure at selected bus stops. As a high priority improved bus timetable information and flags at every stop will be introduced along the town bus routes and also new shelters, low floor build-ups and information at the two stops in Broad Street. All the services will benefit from the rolling programme of improvements listed in Table A8.12.

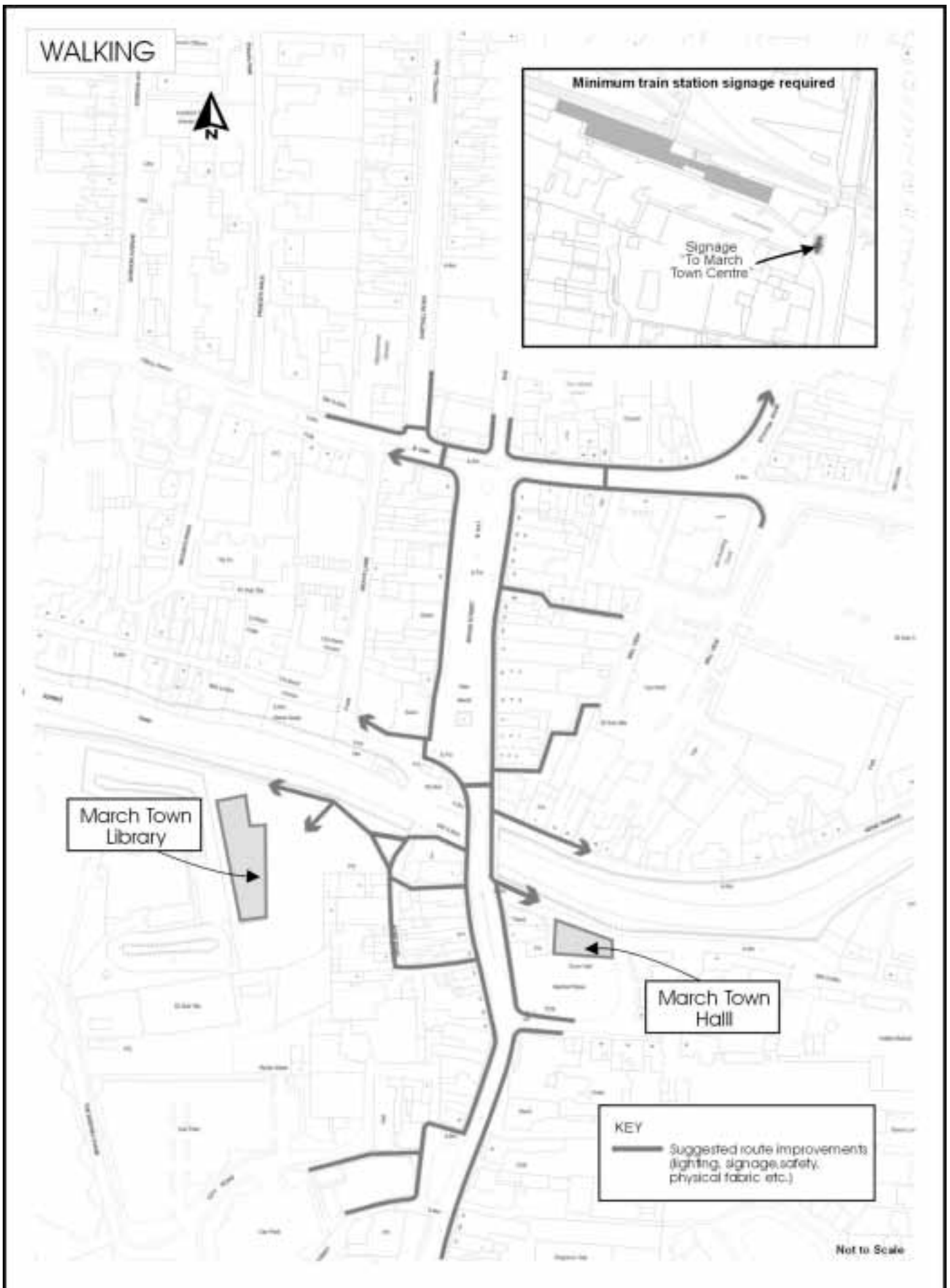
Managing and maintaining efficient transport networks

The measures to improve safety, public transport and walking and cycling are essential to the town in order to encourage sustainable modes of transport and help to make the environment of March more attractive. There also remains, however, the need to cater for the car. In this respect, the strategy

Map A8.10 Proposed March Cycle Network



Map A8.11 Route improvements for pedestrians



has two key measures: improvements to car parking provision and information and the introduction of an Industrial Link Road to divert traffic – and particularly lorries – away from the town centre.

The Industrial Link Road

“The building of the link road in particular will improve safety and quality of life noticeably”

Questionnaire response

There are four Industrial/Trading Estates in March located in the north of the town:

- The March Trading Park, Hostmoor Avenue
- Commercial Road
- Marwick Road
- The Longhill Industrial Estate, Longhill Road

Whilst the March Trading Park is directly accessed off the A141 March Bypass, access to the other three can only effectively be made via March town. This increases the extraneous traffic flow and particularly HGV movements through March, increasing the already present environmental problems through increased traffic congestion, air pollution and traffic noise.

None of the estates can be accessed from or via each other, requiring different signage to each. This can be particularly confusing for those arriving in March for the first time and does not aid the delivery of goods. A Link Road, linking the three main industrial/trading estates would allow direct access to all three directly off the A141, simplify the signage and reduce heavy traffic in the town centre.

The strategy therefore includes the implementation of a suitable link road in two phases as shown in Map A8.13.

- Phase 1: Linking March Trading Estate via Melbourne Avenue to Hundred Road.
- Phase 2: Linking Hundred Road to Elm Road via either Hundred Road and Longhill Road or straight across in a north-easterly direction to Elm Road at a point just north of the existing railway crossing.

The Phase 1 link between Melbourne Avenue and Hundred Road, although longer than a route from Hostmoor Avenue direct to Hundred Road, will be cheaper to build and serve the same purpose as the direct Hostmoor Avenue to Hundred Road link. Such a route has the advantage of obviating the need for acquisition and demolition of residential properties. The link road between Melbourne Avenue and Hundred Road will also provide direct access to the proposed extension to the Commercial Road Estate.

With regard to the Phase 2 link between Hundred Road and Elm Road, two options will be the subject of further consideration. The first option via Hundred Road, Longhill Road and Elm Road will also be subject to discussions with Whitemoor Prison. The second option from Hundred Road, then in a north-easterly direction across the proposed Country Park/County Wildlife Site to Elm Road will be subject to environmental considerations.

The Phase 2 link will cost in the order of £3 million and identifying funding for this is likely to take some time. By contrast, the construction of the Phase 1 link only, will also provide significant benefits by reducing heavy traffic through the town and thus provide significant environmental benefits, but at an estimated cost of just £0.3m. Accordingly, it has been prioritised within the strategy.

Car Parks

There are eight main car parks serving March town centre that collectively provide capacity for 637 cars. They are a mixture of short stay and long stay car parks. Surveys carried out on these show that:

- the main reason for people using the car parks is to go shopping. Consequently, the most popular car parks are those in Broad Street, Mill View and on Market Square
- there is sufficient parking capacity within the town other than on Market Days. The car parks serving March town centre effectively operate at capacity on the Market Day and Saturday, the two important days on which the economic viability of March depends.

It is important for the economic vitality of the town that shoppers are not discouraged from shopping in March and, given the very high percentage of users who use the car parks when shopping, it is essential that the strategy focuses on maximising the efficient use of parking space whilst introducing measures to encourage those who might use alternative forms of travel to do so. To this end, the strategy has two strands:

- to introduce better signage to car parks, particularly those that are less well used, and information within car parks for both car drivers and pedestrians to increase the efficiency of use of parking spaces
- to introduce measures to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists, allowing car park users to move easily between the car parks and the attractions in the town. These are discussed elsewhere in this strategy.

The measures will enable car park users and pedestrians to find the main attractions easily within the town and complement tourism initiatives.

The needs of disabled people

A number of measures in the strategy will benefit disabled people. These include:

- the introduction of taxis with wheelchair access – now a legal requirement for new taxi licences
- the careful introduction of road safety measures so as to make it easier for those with certain disabilities to get around March
- continued support for disabled parking
- pedestrian enhancements in the form of improved paths.

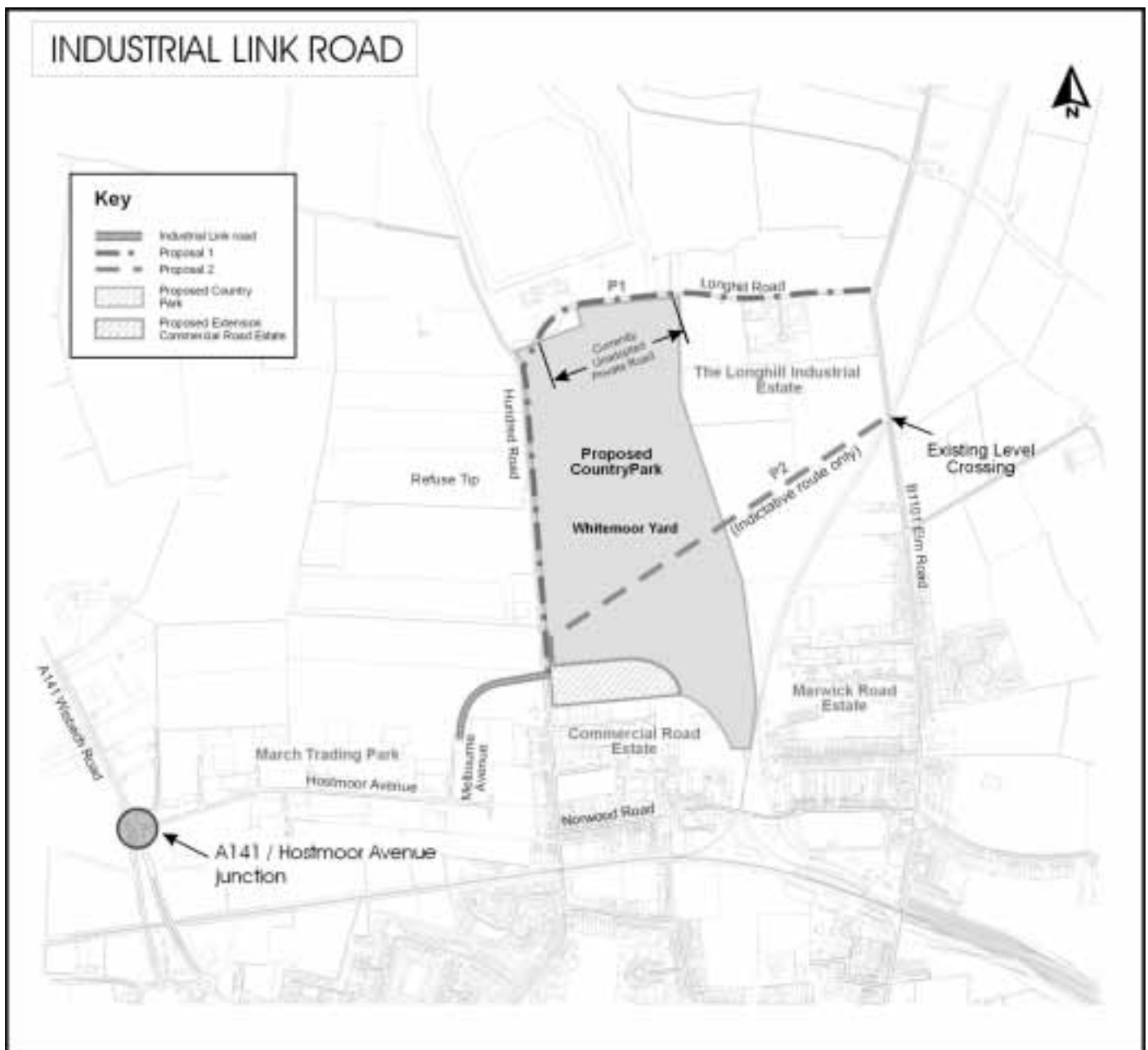
Implementing the Strategy

Programme

The programme of schemes within the strategy reflects the priorities arising through public consultation combined with a recognition of the realistic timescale for the implementation of some schemes. It shows how the measures will be combined so as to provide an integrated package that will address the needs of March. The programme is shown in Table A8.14.

Funding

Funding for the strategy will need to come from a variety of sources. These include the Local Transport Plan, developer contributions, district council contributions and new sources of revenue arising as a result of some of the proposals within the strategy. The pace at which the strategy can be delivered will depend upon the availability of this funding. By providing a clear statement of the schemes for which there is clear public

Map A8.13 Route for the Industrial Link Road

support in the town, this strategy aims to provide a clear platform for securing a wide range of funding sources.

Targets

The measures within this strategy are consistent with the Local Transport Plan objectives of achieving stability in peak hour traffic flow and a positive change in modal split in the Market Towns. To measure the performance of this strategy, a series of detailed targets have also been developed for March. These are:

- a 10% increase in public transport use by 2006
- doubling the number of cyclists by 2006
- a 10% increase in walking by 2006

If met, these targets will contribute significantly to the success of the Local Transport Plan.

Conclusions

“There is much to be commended in the March Transport Strategy”

Questionnaire response

The March Transport Strategy will provide a number of benefits for March. It:

- proposes a clear programme of transport enhancements for the town to 2006
- will significantly increase walking and cycling in the town
- will improve access to parking within the town
- will provide safety measures that will reduce the numbers of accidents.

The strategy gives a clear indication of the transport measures that will be introduced in March up to 2006 and reflects the responses from the strategy consultation process. The measures in the strategy will ensure March continues to be a pleasant place to live and visit.

Table A8.14 Programme of schemes

Phase	Area	Scheme
1	Link Road	Investigate funding, including developer-related contributions if possible, for the Industrial Link Road.
	Safety Measures	Junction of St Peter’s Road with High Street and The Causeway Junction of Burrowmoor Road with the High Street
	Car Parks	Produce and implement a Car Park signing and information strategy
	Buses	Introduce improved bus timetable information and flags at every stop along the Town bus routes (services 356/7)
	Walking	Pedestrian enhancements
	Cycling	Introduce two major cycling schemes: Town Centre to Neal Wade Community College via High Street Norwood Road, Maple Grove, Henson Road/Marylebone Road, existing river crossing, The Chase, across West End Park to the Burrowmoor Road junction with the High Street.
2	Link Road	Commence design of Industrial Link Road.
	Cycling	Railway Station to Neal Wade Community College via new cycle bridge across the river and Elwyn Road.
	Buses	New shelters, low floor build-ups and improved information at the two stops in Broad Street
	Safety Measures	Broad Street improvements
3	Link Road	First phase of the Industrial Link Road to Hundred Road.
	Buses	Commence rolling programme of selected improvements (shelters and build-ups) at selected stops
	Safety Measures	High Street Improvements
4+	Link Road	Second phase of the Industrial Link Road to Elm Road.
	Buses	Continue rolling programme of selected improvements (shelters and build-ups) at selected stops
	Cycling	Complete primary cycle network
	Safety Measures	Dartford Road Wisbech Road

Table A8.15 Strategy funding

Area	Cost
Making Travel Safer	£520,000
Cycling and Walking	£555,000
Public Transport	£24,000
Industrial Link Road	£3,000,000
Car Parks	£35,000
Total	£4,044,000

A summary of the expected cost of each of the elements of the strategy is contained in Table A8.15.

St Neots Transport Strategy

Introduction

This is the St Neots Transport Strategy. It forms part of the Local Transport Plan and has been driven, through public consultation, by St Neots residents, stakeholders and interest groups as well as those who work in and visit the town.

The public consultation undertaken has been used to both identify that the schemes contained within the strategy are appropriate and to produce a priority order for their implementation. The aim of the strategy is to provide a programme of integrated transport initiatives up until the year 2006 that support the Local Transport Plan objectives and contribute towards the prosperity and well-being of the town.

Background

Situated on the western border of Cambridgeshire in the south of Huntingdonshire, St Neots is the largest of the county's Market Towns with a population in excess of 27,000. In recent years, the town has experienced considerable population growth, with a 22% increase over the last 17 years. The number of dwellings in St Neots has risen by 46% over the same period. Currently the majority of residential areas are within 2 km of the town centre. The railway station is 1.5 km from the town centre.

St Neots is one of the main weekly shopping centres in the district. As an addition to the town centre, the town's economic strengths are in its industrial base. There are approximately 11,000 jobs in the town compared to a population of 13,000 that are economically active.

To support the economic vitality of St Neots and enhance the environment, it is important that transport and access to and within the town are improved. There are a number of key transport issues that the strategy will address by providing specific schemes and measures for implementation.

Transport Issues

St Neots is currently provided with a range of transport services. In terms of public transport, the town has rail connections to Huntingdon, Peterborough and beyond, and direct to London with services operating on at least half-hourly frequencies. St Neots, being situated on the east-coast main railway line, is a significant railhead for the region, with 32% of passengers beginning their rail journey at St Neots being from other parts of Cambridgeshire and 11% from outside the County, with London as the main destination. Longer distance bus services to the surrounding towns of Huntingdon, Bedford and Cambridge are

frequent throughout the day and the bus service connecting Eaton Socon with St Neots runs at about 20 minute to half-hour frequencies throughout much of the working day. Services to villages are generally infrequent and some settlements have only market day services.

St Neots is well connected to the national road network. It has a western bypass, the A1(T), and a southern bypass, the A428(T). Provision for cycling in the town is not good although the town is relatively flat. The maximum cycling distance in any direction is about 4 km, or about 25 minutes at a steady 10 kph. On this basis, a higher level of cycling than the 3% currently observed could be expected.

There is significant potential to improve transport in St Neots through this strategy. The elements of the strategy detailed below will achieve this by addressing the key transport problems affecting the town, including:

- the rural nature of the surrounding area, which means that there is a significant reliance on the private car for transport
- the significant levels of commuting within the town and the close surrounding area, with 60% of people travelling no further than 9 km and 40% travelling up to just 2 km
- 65% of journeys to work are by car
- most of the major employers are in locations to the south and east of St Neots, which are poorly served by public transport and cycle facilities
- many roads in St Neots are busy and there are few off-street cycle routes
- the road accident rate in St Neots is relatively high with accidents mainly clustered in the central areas and on the main routes into the town centre
- the town centre has only one road bridge crossing the river at St Neots Road which causes congestion. The High Street is the retail centre of the town and congestion in this area could ultimately prove detrimental to its economic vitality
- lack of high quality footways that are well lit, and an absence of good river crossings.

Aims of the strategy

“Thank you for asking people's opinions”

“At present the traffic congestion in St Neots is very bad and any attempts made to control the volume of traffic are very much welcomed”

Questionnaire responses

The St Neots Transport Strategy aims to be a comprehensive and integrated transport strategy to address the issues noted above. It has at its core, three fundamental objectives drawn from the Local Transport Plan, namely to:

- make travel safer
- promote integrated and sustainable transport
- manage effective transport networks.

The three objectives encapsulate the aspirations for travel within St Neots and are shown in Table A8.16.

In addressing these, the strategy aims to contribute towards the economic vitality and viability of the town. It will also contribute towards achieving the Local Transport Plan targets for reducing the number of accidents and stabilising traffic levels, and will address wider objectives such as reducing social exclusion, promoting health and enhancing economic vitality.