

Woking as a “Hub”

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The focus on Woking as a “hub” should provide the context for ‘Transport for Woking’. To better understand this context, it is necessary to try to understand what a “hub” is, or might be, and then to look at emerging planning policy for Woking (through the emerging South East Plan and Woking Local Development Framework) which seeks to promote Woking’s status as a “hub”.

2.0 Background to the concept of a “hub”

- 2.1 The draft South East Plan (prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly) identifies Woking as one of three “hubs” in Surrey, the others being Guildford and Reigate / Redhill. Although the term “hub” is not defined, it is taken to mean:

- A transport interchange. Woking has excellent rail connections with London and the South and South West. The proposed Airtrack scheme, which will provide a rail link with Heathrow Airport, will further enhance Woking’s connectivity and attractiveness as a transport interchange.
- A destination in its own right. Woking is a strong commercial centre with a burgeoning office market, good shopping and leisure facilities. Due to its good transport connections, Woking is an attractive employment location as well as an accessible destination for shoppers and people to spend their leisure time. Transport links with outlying areas, sometimes referred to as “spokes”, are an important factor in Woking’s attractiveness as a destination.
- A location for sustainable growth. Woking is well served by transport connections and already has a good range of employment, shops and leisure facilities in addition to other services and facilities that people require, such as schools, health facilities and access to open space. It is therefore an attractive location for high quality, high density housing and economic development in the most accessible areas of the town, to enhance its role as a sustainable community.

- 2.2 The report of the Panel of Inspectors who held the Examination in Public into the draft South East Plan, published in August 2007, considered that all three hubs in Surrey had greater potential for sustainable growth than set out in the draft South East Plan. This has resulted in higher housing allocations for the three hubs, with Woking’s annual housing requirement increased by 50 new dwellings per year to 292 new dwellings per year over the Plan period (2006 – 2026).

- 2.3 The Panel report also stressed that the role of a “hub” should be wider than promoting redevelopment close to transport interchanges in town centres, and that the role of hubs should be set out more explicitly as centres for:
- Investment in transport and other infrastructure;
 - Economic activity and employment;
 - New housing development; and
 - Reducing travel patterns by behavioural change.
- 2.4 This led to the Panel recommending a number of changes to the hubs in general and Woking specifically, including the identification of Woking town centre as a centre of significant change (Policy TC2).

3.0 Vision for Woking as a “hub”

- 3.1 The draft South East Plan, together with other national and regional planning and transport strategies, provides part of the context for the preparation of both the Woking Local Development Framework and the Woking element of the Local Transport Plan for Surrey. Work on the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework is fairly advanced. The 2nd Local Transport Plan for Surrey is in place and work will soon commence on the preparation of the 3rd Local Transport Plan, which will be able to better take into account the emerging South East Plan. The key drivers of these local strategies should set the policy direction for a ‘Transport for Woking’ Board.
- 3.2 The first version of the Core Strategy of the Woking Local Development Framework (submitted in October 2006 and withdrawn in July 2007 to undertake further studies required by PPS3 – Housing, published in November 2006) sets out a strong vision and key objectives for the future development of Woking. These remain good in the light of the emerging South East Plan.

Vision for Woking

- 3.3 The vision for Woking, developed following extensive public consultation, is of “Woking as a sustainable, prosperous, attractive and inclusive community in an economically buoyant, growing region. Woking will continue to grow, as a result of its popularity as a place to live and work. The growth is managed, improves quality of life locally, and uses resources sustainably.”

The key objectives

- 3.4 The key objectives underpinning the delivery of the Core Strategy vision are as follows, with emphasis given to those most relevant to a ‘Transport for Woking’ Board:

1. **Woking Town Centre as a growing hub for the area.** A vibrant, high density, high quality environment in which to live, work, access major shops and services and enjoy leisure time.
2. Attractive local centres throughout the Borough providing convenient access to everyday shops and services, local community facilities, parks and open spaces.
3. Homes to suit all needs and pockets. Enough new homes are built to meet Government targets, in a range of sizes and types to meet different needs. New developments are built at densities that make the best use of land in the urban area – but respect the context of Woking’s leafy character. A significant proportion of new homes for sale or rent are priced to suit young families and those on lower incomes.
4. A green Borough where the countryside is never far away. Open Green Belt land is not built on unless there is no other way to deliver key priorities. Green space and wooded areas are a feature of all parts of the Borough. Plenty of open space and countryside is accessible to the public and rich in wildlife. Biodiversity and the quality of the natural environment is protected and enhanced.
5. **A busy, buoyant economy with good quality offices, business parks and industrial areas which meet the needs of modern business.** These are mainly in major business and industrial areas, Woking Town Centre and local centres.
6. A Borough which leads the way on high quality sustainable development and addresses climate change. Much more use is made of renewable energy. New buildings are more energy and water efficient. As a result the use of non renewable energy is reduced. Waste is dealt with in a sustainable, environmentally friendly way.
7. A high quality environment. The quality of air and water is maintained and improved. The impact of noise and light is managed effectively.
8. Buildings and public spaces of which we can be proud. Attractive buildings, in a range of styles, with public spaces where people feel safe and want to spend time.
9. Provision of key services keeps pace as the Borough’s population grows. This includes schools, healthcare, water supply, drainage and flood alleviation, leisure and community centres.

- 10. A transport system that enables people to get to jobs, services and other places they wish to visit safely, in a reasonable and consistent journey time.** Walking and cycling to the Town Centre, district and local centres, schools and other facilities are safe and convenient. Most people who live further away from Woking Town Centre can get to it by good, frequent public transport. Onward journeys to major destinations can be made by train. Using a car is a choice not a necessity.
- 11. A Borough where the whole community has an opportunity to share in the general prosperity and high quality of life.** The Borough is made up of stable mixed communities with decent affordable housing. Everyone has good access to facilities, particularly the elderly, young people and those without access to a car.

- 3.5 In the context of 'Transport for Woking', the above key objectives stress the importance of Woking town centre as an accessible centre for employment, housing, leisure and other services and highlight the need to focus on the town centre's connectivity with the outlying parts of the Borough.
- 3.6 The first version of the Core Strategy (October 2006) paints a broader picture of how the vision and key objectives will be delivered through underlying strategies. These are set out in more detail in the document's policies.

Key points for 'Transport for Woking'

- 3.7 There are a number of key points identified in the Core Strategy's policies which would inform a 'Transport for Woking' Board to better support Woking as a developing "hub". These are summarised below.

Woking Town Centre as a focus for development

- 3.8 Woking Town Centre is identified as the most sustainable location in the Borough for major development, not least because it has relatively well served by public transport. This will mean new housing, employment, retail and leisure, cultural, institutional and community uses being concentrated in the town centre (as set out in a range of Core Strategy policies for these different land uses). There will be a need to support:
- The levels of development required by the emerging South East Plan, which will be set out in the Core Strategy.
 - Delivery of major mixed use development in Woking Town Centre at high densities (set out in Policy DC2).

- Delivery of high quality environment of streets and spaces as a result (as set out in Policy GDC1, DC2 and in two emerging Supplementary Planning Documents on a Town Centre Streets and Spaces Strategy and on Outlook, Amenity, Privacy and Daylight considerations).

Getting into and around Woking Town Centre

3.9 Currently the majority of journeys to Woking Town Centre, even at peak times, are made by car, which results in traffic congestion. The level of development for Woking set out in the South East Plan will only worsen traffic congestion if there is no change in the proportion of journeys made by car (as shown in the Guildford and Woking Integrated Transport Study forecasts). There will need to be support for strategies that aim to increase the proportion of journeys made to the town centre by non-car modes through:

- Management of the availability and cost of parking in the town centre to reduce congestion (reflected in Policy GDC3, the adopted Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document and also in the Parking Management Plan, which aim to manage the availability and cost of parking in the town centre).
- Levering money for capital investment in transport improvements (through the development of a Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document, and Policy TRA1, which seeks to improve pedestrian links between the two sides of the railway station, by creating pedestrian tunnels under the railway at Victoria Arch).
- Implementation of travel measures such as Company Travel Plans, School Travel Plans, car sharing and car clubs as part of the Smarter Travel in Surrey Initiative promoted through the SCC Local Transport Plan (and reinforced in the Core Strategy).

Wider transport objectives

3.10 To enhance Woking's role as a regional transport hub there will need to be significant improvements to the transport infrastructure of Woking Town Centre, which are set out in Core Strategy Policy TRA1. These are identified as:

- A major new railway station concourse, which can only be achieved with the agreement and involvement in partnership working of Network Rail, South West Trains and SCC together with the Borough Council.
- A related all modes interchange – the development of bus station, taxi, pedestrian and cycling facilities serving the railway station. The policy also sets out that additional public parking will only be permitted where it supports enhanced access to the railway station.