
11. Public Transport

Objective 8 – To develop and increase the use of high quality, welcoming public transport

Oxfordshire has a successful public transport model, particularly for journeys into the centre of Oxford. Our core objective is to extend this model to other parts of Oxfordshire, including new developments to provide the whole county with a real choice of attractive, frequent and welcoming public transport.

Policies

- Policy PT1** Oxfordshire County Council will define a three-tier hierarchy of services, consisting of:
- * *Premium Routes* - operating at “turn up and go” frequencies;
 - * *Hourly Plus* - operating at frequencies of at least once an hour during weekdays; and
 - * *Local* - to help meet local accessibility needs.

- Policy PT2** Oxfordshire County Council will help create the conditions for welcoming, effective and successful commercial bus services by working with operators and other partners to:
- improve the reliability of bus services and reduce journey times, especially on Premium Route services;
 - publish up to date, comprehensive public transport information that is publicly available in a range of appropriate formats;
 - improve ticketing (including smartcard ticketing) to make travel easier and reduce boarding times;
 - encourage the use of buses that meet standards for low emissions, particularly those passing through designated Air Quality Management Areas; and
 - encourage social inclusion by ensuring that services use low floor buses, have drivers that are trained in customer care and disability awareness, and that wheelchair users have priority access to designated spaces on vehicles.

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- Policy PT3** **Oxfordshire County Council will support and promote the development of high quality public transport interchanges and infrastructure in appropriate locations.**
- Policy PT4** **Oxfordshire County Council will support proposals for strategic enhancement of the existing Oxfordshire rail network, and will work with the rail industry to facilitate these, providing they do not have unacceptable impacts on the county's rights of way networks, cultural heritage or natural environment.**
- Policy PT5** **Oxfordshire County Council will work with the rail industry and other partners to deliver new or improved stations, new rail services and greater integration of rail and buses.**
- Policy PT6** **Oxfordshire County Council is opposed to the High Speed 2 rail proposals on the grounds of the scheme's business case viability and impact on local communities.**
- Policy PT7** **Oxfordshire County Council will support the development of Quality Bus Partnerships and Rail Partnerships, where appropriate.**

Strategy

11.1 Our strategy for increasing public transport use includes:

- * providing infrastructure to allow attractive and reliable bus services to run across the county in order to reduce congestion and the associated environmental impacts;
- * publishing comprehensive public transport information and promoting public transport;
- * working with bus companies to improve the experience of bus travel;
- * working with the rail industry to develop rail services, stations and railway enhancements to encourage increased rail use; and
- * working with district councils to ensure that taxis are available to complement public transport at times when travel choices are limited.

11.2 The main challenges for public transport in Oxfordshire are:

- * satisfying higher public expectations in future for improved

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- quality and a more welcoming service, including better ticketing systems;
- * encouraging and enabling more people to choose public transport for those journeys for which it provides an attractive alternative, to enable economic growth and reduce congestion and other environmental problems;
 - * encouraging the transfer from private car to rail for longer distance journeys;
 - * traffic congestion and road works impacting on service reliability and efficiency;
 - * providing a choice of travel modes for populations, services and jobs located away from traditional bus routes;
 - * reducing the air pollution and other environmental impacts of buses whilst maintaining accessibility;
 - * reducing the time buses spend at bus stops, particularly in town centres; and
 - * ensuring a high quality experience at all stages of a bus journey, including finding out about it, getting to the stop and waiting for the bus as well as the on-bus journey itself.

Buses

11.3 Oxfordshire County Council will help to ensure the commercial viability of bus services by developing a programme which is specifically related to buses, such as:

- * tackling congestion and delay points along the major bus routes, ensuring that buses can operate reliably and at a commercially attractive speed;
- * effective penetration by bus services as close as possible to the heart of journey attractors such as town centres, employment areas and hospitals, with conveniently located bus stops;
- * good facilities at stops, incorporating effective information and a safe waiting area including shelters and seats for bus passengers, wherever space and resources allow, and well-signposted high quality walking routes and cycle parking where appropriate; and
- * good information to help people find out about the network of services available, and how to find them and use them.

Figure 11.1 Oxfordshire public transport network



Bus Service Hierarchy

11.4 At the top of the county's hierarchy of services are the Premium Routes. These are services running at 'turn up and go' frequencies (of around 15 minutes) throughout the daytime on Mondays to Saturdays, and at least hourly in the evenings and on Sundays. They link the major existing and proposed areas of housing and employment across the county. They have a high

level of bus priority including, in some cases, segregated routes for buses to protect them from congestion and delay. They will have a high standard of passenger facilities at bus stops and interchanges, often including real time information. As a result of this, Oxfordshire County Council expects that such services will, after any initial 'pump priming' funding, be able to operate without subsidy and be run using high quality, easy access, low emission vehicles with high levels of driver training and modern ticketing systems.

- 11.5 Premium Route bus services cover the main movement corridors, where most passenger trips are made and where they can make the greatest potential contribution to the reduction in private car use and traffic congestion. They are mainly concentrated in and between Oxford and the larger towns but will in future serve major employment, service/retail and residential areas elsewhere.
- 11.6 Where significant employment, service/retail or residential developments are proposed, but these are not situated adjacent to a Premium Route, then developers will be expected to provide appropriate levels of funding to deliver an agreed network of Bus Routes linking the development with nearby towns and transport hubs. These 'Development Routes' will operate to specified frequency levels and hours of operation during the evenings and on Sundays. These routes will be designed to attract significant numbers of passengers and will be complemented with appropriate travel plan measures, with the aim of achieving a commercial self-sustaining service after a period of pump-priming funding provided by the developer. For the larger developments, a Premium Route level of bus service will be specified, but for smaller developments, a better-than-hourly level of bus service with seven-day and evening operation will be requested.
- 11.7 The next level in the hierarchy comprises hourly-plus services. These serve lower density corridors which nevertheless have significant potential flows of passengers, including smaller towns and many rural areas. These Hourly bus services generally operate between 7am and 7pm on Mondays to Saturdays. The aim is that Hourly Services should move towards being commercially self-sustaining in due course. Where additional funding can be procured from developments or other sources, then it may be possible to operate a more frequent service or provide a service on Sundays or during evenings.
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- 11.8** The final tier in the hierarchy comprises local services. These ensure essential links from more remote areas. They are provided in a variety of ways, as appropriate for local circumstances, with service frequency ranging from several times per weekday to once per week. These local services are considered more fully in Chapter 7 on Improving Accessibility.

Bus Infrastructure

- 11.9** The provision of high-quality infrastructure is fundamentally important to the successful operation of bus and coach services in Oxfordshire. Reliable and welcoming public transport services can only be operated through an arrangement where vehicles operate congestion-free and arrive at high-quality stops where users can wait in comfort, knowing their service will arrive on time.
- 11.10** Improving access and connectivity to bus stops and other interchanges (e.g. rail stations) from other modes, particularly walking and cycling, is essential to promoting walking and cycling and encouraging increased use of public transport. Oxfordshire County Council will consider access to walking and cycling networks and location of supporting facilities when investigating the siting of new bus stops.
- 11.11** **Rapid transit for Oxford** – a form of high quality “rapid transit” public transport will be considered as part of our Eastern Arc strategy for Oxford. This could be in the form of high quality bus, light rail or guided trolleybus system, serving the Park & Ride sites and major employment and housing areas in the Eastern Arc. This is covered in more detail within the Oxford Area Strategy (Chapter 13).
- 11.12** **Park and Ride** - the Oxford park and ride sites were primarily provided to reduce the amount of general traffic approaching Oxford city centre and to provide real environmental benefits in sensitive city centre streets. Over time this principle has been extended to provide an edge-of-urban area facility for the main hospitals, reducing the amount of car traffic through the Headington and Marston areas. Increasing demand for parking spaces at Oxford’s park and ride sites has resulted in the need to expand the sites and investigate opportunities for developing new sites. There is a commitment to expand Thornhill park and ride’s capacity by around 500 spaces by 2013. More details of the Thornhill expansion are included in the Oxford Area Strategy (Chapter 13).

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- 11.13 There is an existing policy to develop remote park and ride sites further from Oxford along the A34 (north) corridor towards Bicester, along the A34 (south) corridor towards Abingdon-on-Thames/Milton and along the A40 (west) corridor towards Witney/Carterton. This concept has proved successful at some locations in Scotland where a well-located site adjacent to a high-frequency commercial bus corridor can provide a cost-effective transfer point from car to bus. Some progress has been made in securing a site adjacent to the South West Bicester development and a study has looked at possible locations in West Oxfordshire. Viability would depend on many factors such as the availability and cost of parking spaces and the scope for bus priority measures.
- 11.14 Our long term ambition at all park and ride sites is to have a high level of security and attractive terminal buildings with waiting and ancillary facilities, easy access for drivers to the road network and well designed walking routes from parking to bus stop areas.
- 11.15 **Interchanges** - apart from the Park & Ride sites, Oxfordshire does not have many other purpose-built interchanges. Most bus services in Oxford currently leave from many different parts of the city centre and for some interchange journeys a substantial walk is required from one bus to another. The exception is that some country services leave from Gloucester Green, although this bus station is primarily used by long distance coaches and services to London and the airports.
- 11.16 Significant efforts have been made, as part of the *Transform Oxford* project and other initiatives, to improve signage and wayfinding information. Aspirations to enhance the pedestrian experience in Oxford city centre mean that key bus stops will naturally be clustered in hubs around the edges of the commercial centre. To improve interchange, particularly for cross city journeys, bus routes may need to be extended and turning facilities provided to reduce the requirement to walk extended distances between services, although providing this will be difficult in the highly constrained city centre.
- 11.17 Banbury rail station is located relatively close to the town centre, bus station and the Bridge Street bus 'hub', but there is significant severance by major roads between them. The Canalside development should deliver better integration between bus and rail by providing bus stops nearer to the railway station and by
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safeguarding a bus route between the station and the Bankside area.

- 11.18 Bicester's Bure Place bus station will soon be replaced by a series of bus stops along Manorsfield Road, which will be adjacent to the new retail area. Significant new developments within the Bicester area are expected to generate demand for large numbers of additional buses, so some further modification to bus arrangements will be likely in the future.
- 11.19 Buses penetrate into central retail areas of other towns and interchange 'hubs' generally allow connections from one route to another. There are physical constraints on the capacity of these areas, so operators and planners need to take account of the actual number of bus stops available when planning timetables and layovers.
- 11.20 Oxford rail station provides a terminal, or hub, for some bus services, and it is proposed that this will be re-designed so that more buses can serve it. It is intended that services from here will link to as many parts of the city and significant destinations beyond as possible within the physical constraints of the site. Oxfordshire County Council and its partners will continue to work on proposals to ensure that Oxford Station can meet future demands. The Station has a major role in the regeneration of the West End of Oxford.
- 11.21 The integration of rail and bus services is important at Oxford and Didcot stations and there are current projects at both and at water Eaton to improve the quality of the physical infrastructure and to make it easier for public transport users to transfer from one mode to another. At other stations the scale of the interchange arrangements is more modest but, at the minimum, there should be the equivalent of an integrated Premium Routes flag pole and information case unit with directional signing as appropriate.
- 11.22 **Coach facilities** – Oxford is a hub for express coach services, with the A40/M40 corridor towards London and the airports supporting coach services which are among the most frequent in Europe. The numbers of people using Thornhill to access these services have caused this Park & Ride site to fill up very early, on each day, so the plans for an expanded Thornhill will include measures to manage this demand.

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- 11.23 While Oxfordshire has some terminal facilities for scheduled coaches there is a problem with accommodating the many 'tourist' coaches which bring visitors to Oxford. Planned city centre developments will place further pressure on the space available to accommodate visiting coaches so a strategy is being developed to allocate some 'remote' spaces for layover purposes along with recognised set-down and pick-up points on the edge of the city centre.
- 11.24 **Lewknor interchange** – there is a limited amount of free car parking available along a section of B4009 close to the M40 junction which is used by commuters as an informal park and ride. Individuals can park their vehicle in the lay-by and then travel onward to either London or Oxford using the coach service that serves the nearby bus stops. This can cause problems with vehicles parking on the verge when these lay-bys are full. Oxfordshire County Council has no current plans to develop this site in the near future. However, it may be considered for expansion or as a potential site for remote park and ride within the life of this Plan.
- 11.25 Beyond the 1,400 stops expected to be equipped to Premium Route standards, there are about 2,400 other bus stops around Oxfordshire. Although the majority of these stops now have a timetable information case, many do not have any hard-standing area or a suitable surface for disabled, frail and elderly passengers. Opportunities will be taken to introduce low-cost improvements, if possible on a whole-route basis, starting with the hourly routes.
- 11.26 Where significant new developments are planned, we will seek developer funding to pay for the necessary bus stop infrastructure and eventual inclusion in the Premium Route bus network map. For the Bicester eco town this infrastructure could take the form of a high-frequency busway, with high quality intermediate stops. For Science Vale UK, Premium Route standards of infrastructure will be considered along with limited sections of segregated busway. Investment in high quality bus infrastructure should be aimed at developing the bus services using this infrastructure to a Premium Route frequency. We encourage new developments to be situated within sustainable locations which are within close access to public transport; this is covered in more detail in the Supporting Development strategy chapter 8.
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Information

- 11.27 Oxfordshire County Council's first Transport Information Strategy for Bus Services was revised in 2006 and will be subject to further amendment in 2011. The strategy clarifies responsibility for the provision of information and who should meet the costs. Oxfordshire County Council generally provides bus stop infrastructure, including the pole, bus stop flag and timetable case. Operators are expected to meet the cost of providing and maintaining information relating to their own services.
- 11.28 Oxfordshire's Real Time Information is amongst the best-performing systems in the UK primarily because the partners have focused on achieving quality, in terms of proportion of buses accurately predicted at stops and bus operators have invested in the on-bus computers and so have a vested interest in the performance of the system. The issues faced by the system include whether the geographic coverage should be extended and whether the functionality of the system should be developed.
- 11.29 The technology of electronic communications is rapidly changing and it is difficult to predict the lifespan or the take-up of new devices. The basic system output (predicted times of next buses at stops) can be displayed in various ways on a variety of media. Work is proceeding on a project to re-design the 'Oxontime' website to make the information more accessible to a wider range of users. A new type of solar-energy sign has been deployed in a few locations. This type of sign can also display other types of information such as fares and known upcoming disruptions.

Ticketing

- 11.30 Ease of use and attractiveness to passengers are recognised as important factors; speeding up boarding is a particular issue on the more frequent and heavily used services, especially in congested locations. For example, the time buses spend at stops in Oxford city centre and other town centres, which improved ticketing systems and additional ticket verification points could do much to help. Bus priority and other measures to speed up buses need to be complemented by modern ticketing systems, i.e. smartcards.
- 11.31 The development of off-bus ticketing is supported, as a means of reducing bus journey times and providing public transport users

with a range of travel options.

- 11.32 Oxfordshire County Council will work in partnership with operators to develop improved ticketing schemes including further development and roll out of smartcards to potentially include other services like parking at park and ride sites.

Commercial Services

- 11.33 Although Oxfordshire County Council has no direct control over the commercial services that bus operators choose to run, we work closely with them to influence services.
- 11.34 **Quality partnerships** - partnerships with bus operators will have an essential role in delivering service improvements. The benefits are that Oxfordshire County Council's investment in infrastructure is supported by operators investing in new vehicles, improved training and enhanced services.
- 11.35 These have been successful in attracting significant numbers of passengers and achieving a high level of bus use, whilst minimising the impact of the high levels of bus service on other road users and the environment.
- 11.36 The County Council is working in Partnership with Oxford's two main bus operators, Oxford Bus Company and Stagecoach Oxford, to develop a Bus Qualifying Agreement for the specification and operation of city centre bus services (focusing on the four main radial routes into the city - Kidlington to Oxford along Banbury Road, Barton to Oxford along London Road, Blackbird Leys to Oxford along Cowley Road and Rose Hill to Oxford along Iffley Road).
- 11.37 The aim of the Agreement is to bring bus user and environmental benefits to Oxford by securing a service pattern between operators on these routes which would include a substantial reduction in the total number of buses operating on them. Part of this agreement includes the introduction of shared ticketing across the Oxford zone (allowing passengers to use either operator regardless of which one sold them the ticket); the launch of new smartcard ticketing technology from October 2010 was the first step towards shared ticketing. The agreement also includes the replacement of buses used on these services by new vehicles meeting Euro V emissions standards, including a large fleet of hybrid buses, which will also support the Low Emission Zone proposed for the city. The Qualifying Agreement is

expected to become finalised and operational in 2011 and is predicted to lead to a 10% overall reduction in city centre bus numbers with a 17% reduction on the busiest corridor (High Street) and a 30% reduction in Queen Street (which would further enhance the recent pedestrian improvement scheme).

- 11.38 The County Council will also be investigating whether there are other opportunities to use this sort of agreement to bring about benefits to bus operation elsewhere in Oxfordshire, rather than taking a more directive Quality Contract approach.

Other bus services

- 11.39 In addition to the hierarchy of scheduled bus services there are a number of specialised services designed particularly to meet the needs of groups. The most numerous of these are school bus services. Oxfordshire County Council provides for those living over three miles from state-maintained schools, which (by law) must be available free to those users. These are run largely as an independent network not available to the general public. Some independent schools also provide services. Higher and further education establishments provide a range of services; some of these – notably the *Brookesbus* network provided by Oxford Brookes University and the bus service funded by Abingdon & Witney College to link its two sites – also run as scheduled local bus services which contribute to the local network.

- 11.40 Some major employment sites fund bus services to serve their sites, notably Harwell Science & Innovation Campus and Oxford Science Park. These are generally combined with local bus services. Some retail sites also fund shoppers' services to their sites; these generally run free to users, are not registered as local bus services and completely separate from the local bus network. Oxfordshire County Council expects the operators of such sites to ensure that they are accessible by public transport without funding from the council but, where they might be conveniently combined with a local bus service which is also useful for other journeys, will consider joint funding arrangements.

Rail

- 11.41 Oxfordshire is strategically located on the national rail network. Five rail corridors pass through the county:
- the Great Western line linking Oxford and Didcot Parkway to Reading, London (Paddington), Bristol and South Wales, along with the branch line to Henley-on-Thames;

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- the Chiltern Line from London (Marylebone) to Birmingham, serving Banbury and Bicester;
 - the north-south line from the south coast to Birmingham and the north, serving Banbury and Oxford; and
 - the Cotswold Line linking Oxford to Worcester and Hereford; and
 - The line from Oxford to Bicester, which is proposed to be extended to provide direct services to London (Marylebone) with a new Parkway station at Water Eaton and to Milton Keynes as part of the re-opened East West Rail corridor.

Current Situation

11.42 Railways are an integral part of the transport network in Oxfordshire. We have worked extensively with the Department for Transport and the Rail industry in recent years to promote and develop the rail network. As a result of forecast increases in demand for travel in the county, Oxfordshire County Council has developed a long-term *Rail Strategy for Oxfordshire* to cover the period up to 2034.

11.43 The Strategy sets out how investment in rail will play a key role in supporting Oxfordshire's economic development. There is an opportunity for the railway to establish itself as the backbone of the county's transport network, especially linking the settlements in the Oxfordshire "*Growth Arc*" for passengers and businesses, and in so doing helping to reduce congestion on the A34 and other strategic routes.

Vision & Objectives

11.44 The Vision for the Rail Strategy is:

To develop a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient rail network that meets the access and mobility needs of residents, businesses and visitors, and supports the development of the county's economy.

11.45 The specific purposes of the strategy include:

- * explaining how a safe, efficient and easily accessible rail network will help to deliver economic priorities for the county, in particular the creation of new jobs;
- * setting out a coherent, evidence-based and realistic set of investments that the County Council would like the rail

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- industry to help us plan and deliver; and
 - * identifying rail as an integral part of the county, regional and national transport system which provides an alternative to road for passenger and freight movements.

Rail freight

11.46 Significant volumes of freight pass through the county. The route between the Port of Southampton and the Midlands and North of England carries a large volume of freight traffic. A £70 million project enabling higher-sided containers to be transported by train instead of lorry is already removing thousands of HGVs off the A34 and other roads.

- 11.47 Although container traffic accounts for the majority of freight activity on the county's railways, other freight uses include:
- * Aggregates for the construction industry.
 - * Didcot Power station (imported coal from Avonmouth Docks).
 - * Didcot is also a key hub for the Ministry of Defence and trains from there serve various supply and ordnance depots in southern England, including one of the country's largest depots at Bicester.
 - * The Cowley BMW plant in Oxford uses rail to transport completed Mini cars to Purfleet and Southampton Docks for export abroad, and household waste.
 - * Network Rail has a materials supply depot near Oxford.

Future Challenges

11.48 The rail network in Oxfordshire faces a number of challenges over the course of this Local Transport Plan, including:

- * catering for economic growth and maximising benefit, especially for key areas like Science Vale UK;
- * network capacity (track and train) and conflicts for track access such as between long distance high speed and local stopping services and between passenger and freight services;
- * sustaining desirable levels of train service, for instance by encouraging off-peak use; and
- * improving links with adjoining regional and sub-regional centres and international gateways.

11.49 There are also more local issues that will need to be

considered in improving the rail network, such as access to and from the stations, interchange with other modes (including issues of facilities, timetabling and ticketing) and improving accessibility for disabled people.

Rail Initiatives

11.50 There are a number of strategically important projects that are either committed to being delivered within the next 2-3 years or are currently being planned for future delivery. These include:

- * **Didcot Parkway Station Forecourt** – a local authority led project to redevelop the forecourt and car parks to create a modern high quality transport hub (by 2013);
- * **Oxford Station** – a major station redevelopment to increase passenger and freight capacity, improve passenger facilities and create a multi-modal interchange (by 2018);
- * **Evergreen 3** - a new half hourly service from Oxford to London (Marylebone) via Water Eaton Parkway and Bicester following the construction of a new railway chord connecting the Oxford-Bicester and London-Banbury lines and the upgrading of the line between Oxford and Bicester (by 2016);
- * **East West Rail** – new passenger services connecting Oxford and the Oxfordshire Growth Arc with Milton Keynes and Bedford, together with a spur to Aylesbury, following a £270 million investment to reinstate the line between Bicester and Bletchley (by 2019); and
- * **Electrification/Intercity Express Programme** – a major project to fully electrify the network to Didcot and Oxford together with a new fleet of express trains.

11.51 Oxfordshire County Council also has aspirations for improved access by rail to Science Vale UK. At present the main point is via Didcot Parkway, which is set to be improved, but we will continue to investigate the potential; for a Grove & Wantage station together with improved connections from Culham station to the Science Centre.

11.52 The Rail Strategy also looks at all the rail lines running through Oxfordshire and identifies a number of smaller issues and aspirations at particular stations. These include:

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- * **cycle access and parking** - cycle routes to the station need to be planned and implemented to provide a fast and safe means of getting to the station from towns and villages and the Sustrans National Cycle Network;
 - * **station improvements** – joint projects and investment to enhance parking and other facilities at key stations;
 - * **pedestrian access** – the routes for walking to and from railway stations need to be considered and where appropriate improved, including access for disabled people;
 - * **Station Travel Plans** - a station travel plan is a strategy for managing the travel generated by a station with the aim of reducing its environmental impact, typically involving the promotion of sustainable modes of travel;
 - * **bus and train information** - in 2008, Oxfordshire County Council introduced local transport information posters at rail stations along the Cotswold Line and has since rolled them out to every station in Oxfordshire;
 - * **through ticketing** - there are already a number of add-on tickets available at some stations, notably *PlusBus*, the national bus-rail ticket which has seen sales grow steadily to some 250,000 tickets in 2008/09; and
 - * **marketing and promotion** - Oxfordshire County Council has been successful in forming effective partnerships that have increased rail use since 2002.

High Speed Rail

- 11.53** The proposed route for the high speed HS2 line from London to Birmingham crosses a small part of north east Oxfordshire. With no intermediate stations proposed, the line offers few direct benefits to the county. Oxfordshire County Council is opposed to HS2 on the basis that it is unconvinced about the overall business case for the project.
- 11.54** Oxfordshire County Council is also concerned about the environmental and other impacts of the current HS2 proposals on local communities.