

Devizes  
Community Area



*Community  
Plan*



## **Community Plan 2012 - 2026**

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# **The Devizes Community Area Partnership**

## **Community Plan 2012 - 2026**

### **Introduction**

This is a Community Plan. It has been prepared with the help of over eighty volunteers working across seven themed groups. Some of these are professionals who have generously given of their spare time to assist us, many representing other organisations within the area; others are retired people whose experience has proved invaluable; and last, but by no means least, are those concerned citizens who have brought a strong dose of common sense into the discussions. The plan has then been shaped to a large extent by the almost three thousand responses we received to our area-wide survey and finally by around eighty stakeholders at a specially convened Community Planning event.

What is its aim? Covering the period up to 2026, it focuses on two over-arching aspects; the strengthening of our communities, engendering a sense of belonging and preserving a high-quality of life for those living here. Whilst it is essentially local in character, it does not ignore the big issue of our generation, global warming, with all the consequences that will have if we do not play our part. It also takes into account the tough economic climate which is likely to prevail for most, if not all, of the plan period and is particularly concerned to safeguard existing jobs and to create new ones.

Our hope and intention is that this plan will form a “road map”, guiding the way the area will develop over this period. But it is more than that, it now forms the basis for action plans that our teams are already working on to ensure that the vision becomes a reality.

We recognise that the days when governments threw money at problems have gone. If we, the community, want to ensure our quality of life, we have to do something about it ourselves. This is a Community Plan, it does not require large sums of money from Government; it is not “pie in the sky”, it sets out the direction and vision against which important decisions should be taken; it is eminently achievable.

The Community owns this plan and the Community, working together, is well able to fulfil its aims.

I commend it to you.

Tony Sedgwick

Chairman

## **Countryside & the Environment**

### **Introduction**

The scope of this strategy covers both the countryside around us and the environment in which we live. It seeks to deal with the big issues facing our rural communities, whilst also tackling the problems that those living in urban areas face.

The vast majority of our community area is countryside. Whilst it is sparsely populated it has immense value as a source of food, a place for recreation, a tourist attraction and for its wealth generation.

Most of this land is outside the control of the community but we have a vital interest in it. Our concern is to: -

- Preserve the quality of life for rural communities
- Support the rural economy
- Protect the countryside from harmful developments
- Play our full part in looking after it
- Ensure access to the countryside is not diminished and, in fact, is improved where this is beneficial.

Our community survey and the Community Planning Event revealed the concerns people have regarding the environment and these can be summarised as: -

- A sense of belonging should be an over-arching theme
- Need for more paths linking residential areas and schools and also villages
- Litter both in town and countryside
- Fly tipping
- Need to conserve our heritage and concern over the state of significant buildings
- Need for an increased awareness of the environment and environmental costs

### **Preserving the Quality of Life for the Rural Community**

The quality of life in a rural community can be seriously degraded by poor communication both physical and electronic. We fully endorse the strategy of our colleagues in the transport group in regard to the former. The availability of high-speed internet connections is already important to all rural businesses; as on-line activity continues to increase its significance will grow. It is not only businesses that need the internet, on-line shopping is of particular importance to villagers. We wish to see our villages provided with internet access that meets the levels of the Universal Service

Commitment<sup>1</sup>. This can be achieved within a reasonable budget as demonstrated by Colchester's initiative<sup>2</sup>.

Traditionally the village pub and village shop have been a focus for the community. Many villages now lack a shop and consequently residents are obliged to drive to the nearest town for their everyday shopping requirements. Village pubs are also closing which has the twofold effect of removing a community meeting point and reducing tourism. Communities should be encouraged to retain or re-establish village shops. The role of the local pub in the life of the community could well be examined to see whether it can be viable in the long-term, possibly by combining the two.

Many villages suffer from heavy traffic which, in some cases, is a serious threat to the quality of village life. We would wish to see steps taken to reduce the dominance of road traffic and rebalance the relationship between car and people.

The number of people working in agriculture has dropped by 17% over the past ten years and that trend is continuing. There is a need to create alternative employment therefore. Failure to do so will inevitably result in a further decline in village life and in increased commuting.

Another important aspect is to ensure that the next generation have an understanding and appreciation of the value of our countryside and rural lifestyle. Full use should be made of local sites of special scientific interest and of nature reserves to educate our children.

## Supporting the Rural Economy

The best way of ensuring the countryside remains as such is to ensure that the rural economy thrives. This can be achieved in numerous ways such as:

1. Supporting local food production through Farmers' Markets, Farm Shops and a policy of buying local produce where possible.
2. Supporting the conversion of redundant farm buildings to accommodate start-ups and small businesses fitted to a rural environment.
3. Encouraging maximum use of the country by our community.
4. Promoting tourism.

## Recreation in the Countryside

There are many traditional countryside leisure activities and a number of new ones. The test as to whether an activity should be encouraged is that it should not damage the environment or the ecology, do no harm to agriculture, not cause a nuisance to other users and residents, and not damage access routes and footpaths.

Where activities meet the above test they should be encouraged. This means that access paths need to be kept clear, adequate signage needs to be in place and parking provision made either on or off-road. More than that, new paths, particularly cycle paths need to be identified and constructed. This

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation see [USC Details](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Colchester Borough Council are installing wireless broadband across its area including isolated rural communities](#)

will encourage the population to use bikes for access to the countryside, as well as improving communications between communities. A major route is the Kennet & Avon Canal towpath; unfortunately its condition is such as to deter many from using it. There is a need for resurfacing for much of its length and then a regular maintenance programme. Funding for this is a problem; the towpath is owned by British Waterways who get little income from towpath users. It is understandable then that little is spent on its maintenance. A major issue for this strategy is to source adequate funding to maintain what is a major cycleway and footpath used both by locals and tourists.

Additional paths such as the Great Stones Way should be supported if they will have beneficial effects on the community through increased tourism.

## Developments in the Countryside

Our guiding principles in this regard are:

1. We should retain as much agricultural land as possible since the UK has a growing trade gap on food which needs to be addressed on both economic and ecological grounds.
2. Sufficient housing should be built to fulfil the need of the local community. Any further building must not be in such volume as to change the nature of the community.
3. Industrial and office building should utilise redundant farm buildings wherever possible.

## Improving our Environment

By and large the concerns of the community over our environment can best be addressed by the communities themselves.

Above all our community needs to be more aware of the cost of their activities to the environment and to take steps to reduce any adverse impacts. We need initiatives to encourage such things as buying locally produced food to reduce greenhouse gases and pollution from delivery vehicles, to increase the amount we recycle and putting pressure on retailers to reduce the amount of packaging used.

Litter is a universal problem and persists down the generations. Carefully placed waste bins may assist and certainly overflowing bins result in litter; but the long-term solution is a concerted campaign to make our residents proud of their community and to own responsibility for its cleanliness; in short to engender a sense of belonging. We wish to see an effective campaign mounted to reduce the amount of litter and to find ways in which the community takes responsibility by organising clear up parties, either with volunteers or by using the Probation Service and/or Youth Employment schemes to provide the labour. Our conviction is that a long-term education programme is required before the problem of litter can be significantly reduced.

We are concerned that recent housing developments in Devizes have been on greenfield sites so that the amount of green areas available for the community to enjoy has reduced and these have been moved effectively beyond that to where people are prepared to walk. This has given rise to people driving their dogs out of town to an area where they can walk them. We wish to see green recreation areas being clearly defined in any further housing developments schemes, so that we do

not perpetuate the urban sprawl of Devizes and see residents driving to the countryside for basic recreation.

Devizes itself suffers from high levels of air pollution, with one area already subject to Air Quality Management measures. There is no question that the pollution levels we have been experiencing in the town centre are harmful to public health. Every possible step must be taken to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate further and indeed that air quality improves to an acceptable level.

## **Climate Change**

It is incumbent on us all to do what we can to counteract climate change. This issue has been addressed in other sections and can only be repeated here. We wish to support organisations such as the Sustainable Devizes Network in demonstrating practical ways in which this can be achieved.

## **Access to the Countryside**

Public footpaths and bridleways should be adequately signed and kept clear of obstruction. The public who use these paths provide the most efficient and cost-effective form of monitoring and they should be encouraged to be active in reporting problems to Wiltshire Council.

Getting to the countryside can also prove a problem for those without a car. Improvements in rural public transport would be beneficial in this regard.

## Crime and Community Safety

### Preamble

Wiltshire has one of the lowest crime rates in the country. Nevertheless, any crime is a serious issue and our objective is to reduce it still further through a number of focused strategies which are detailed in this report. Road Traffic Accidents are also a concern and we have targeted a reduction in these within our plan.

### Behaviour

Our priorities in this area include tackling vehicle crime, anti-social behaviour, hate crime, domestic violence and careless, reckless or dangerous behaviour by road users

- Reduce burglary from dwellings, vehicle related crime.
- Reduce anti-social behaviour.
- Reduce the numbers of those seriously injured or killed on Wiltshire roads.

### People

Priorities include working with young people, particularly those who misuse drugs and alcohol to reduce the number of crimes they commit.

Others within our strategy are persistent offenders and those who feel vulnerable.

We aim to provide treatment services intended to assist offenders to deal with addiction and its impact on their lifestyles and thereby reduce the harm caused to society.

We are working to increase the involvement of young people with the “civic processes”.

Working with our Culture and Leisure Group we aim to provide improved locally-based leisure facilities for young people.

### Places

Our priorities include tackling problems in places where certain crimes are more prevalent (“warm” spots) and in isolated communities.

In this respect we aim to ensure that police respond to “immediate response” category calls in 20 minutes in the rural areas within our Community Area.

### Community Involvement

The community needs to be involved in an active partnership with our police team. To that end we are working towards more frequent attendance at parish, town council and local community meetings. In this way we wish to empower local communities to consolidate crime reduction measures through community involvement.

## CCTV

CCTV has been shown to reduce crime, to increase detection rates and to reduce the fear of crime. The system installed in Devizes is no exception. In recent time it has been threatened by lack of funding and has been close to having to be abandoned.

Whilst funding is now promised for the next three years, a key aim is to secure long-term funding of this important tool in our crime fighting armoury.

## Culture and Leisure

### Preamble

A thriving leisure and cultural environment brings the community together. It provides activities for all ages and channels young people into activities which benefit them in many different ways.

This plan seeks to achieve this in three ways:

1. Improve leisure, sporting, arts, community and cultural facilities throughout the Community Area, making them accessible to all.
2. Encourage community involvement and volunteering, particularly among young people.
3. Ensure that community events are encouraged in the villages and rural areas.

The economy of the area also benefits from many of our cultural and leisure activities by attracting visitors to the area.

The majority of activities under the heading of culture and leisure are dependent on volunteers from our community. We are concerned to ensure to secure the future by encouraging more volunteers, particular from the younger generation.

### Objectives and Actions

- A. To ensure that the distinctive features of the Devizes Community Area form part of the Wiltshire Cultural Strategy.
- B. To encourage the continuing development of theatre and cinema in Devizes and improve arts, culture and leisure provision in the town and villages.
- C. To ensure appropriate access and best use of the Devizes Community Area's distinctive cultural and historic features e.g. Wiltshire Heritage Museum, The Kennet and Avon Canal and its Museum, the Market Lavington Village Museum and the Roundway battle site. To this end the group has reviewed signing with Devizes from a visitor's viewpoint and is working with the appropriate authorities to ensure this is comprehensive and up to date.
- D. To support such events as the Devizes and village carnivals, Devizes Festival, Devizes Christmas Festival, Devizes Street Festival, Devizes Food and Drink Festival and speciality markets and fairs; all with the aim of bringing a vibrant artistic and cultural life to the area, providing access to all and supporting economic development.
- E. To encourage the work and continuation of youth organisations and groups including those run on a voluntary basis. Also to make the opportunities available to young people for culture and leisure better known.
- F. To retain existing and promote new and/or better sports and community facilities in the town and villages.
- G. To bring about an increase in the number of volunteers in the area and the amount of time given and, in particular to seek to engage young people in volunteering.

## The Economy

### Introduction

A thriving local economy will enable other actions to be put in place so that the area becomes more self-contained, there are sufficient and suitable jobs to meet demand and that Devizes becomes and remains an attractive destination for business, residents and a centre for tourism.

We see the key ingredients for this economy as: -

1. The creation of a range of new high value jobs within the Area so that future expansion can be genuinely employment led.
2. An increase in tourism making Devizes a **destination**.
3. More highly achieving schools with stronger links to local business.
4. The creation of a rail link to London (ideal location identified as being at Lydneyway).

Our proposals for ensuring that our economy does thrive are outlined below.

### Creation of New Jobs

In order for Devizes to thrive it is imperative that we encourage new businesses to the area and help the existing ones to thrive and expand. We have the basics of a strong infrastructure with the sort of businesses that can support and feed off one another. If we can use this to promote similar companies we will be able to promote the town as the logical destination for certain industries

We now have high speed broadband and have identified areas suitable for development, are working on establishing a rail link and have a large workforce including those currently employed within the public sector (circa 20%). Devizes needs to become a destination for employers which will result in:

1. Reduce commuting out of the town, thereby reducing traffic levels and assisting the Council in meeting its greenhouse gas emission target.
2. The money earned from these new jobs will be spent to a large degree in the Devizes area providing a life-line for existing retail and service industry jobs.

Currently employment in Devizes is provided by:

1. The Public Sector
2. Retail
3. Commercial companies, very largely SMEs.

Given the current economic outlook it is very likely that the size of the public sector will shrink whilst the retail sector is unlikely to grow. Therefore common sense dictates that new jobs can only be provided by the private sector. History shows that it is small new companies that lead the way out of recession. Entrepreneurs starting new companies are filled with enthusiasm and are prepared to take risks to create jobs, whilst larger companies are conservative and tend to hold on to what they

have; their goal in difficult times is survival, not growth. For that reason we need to focus on the needs of entrepreneurs.

Jobs will not be created without a clearly defined strategy. We suggest that this should be three-fold: -

1. To help existing employers to expand by:
  - a. Understanding their needs and seeking to assist them.
  - b. Locating and securing new employment land.
  - c. Attracting existing businesses to relocate to the area. In targeting appropriate businesses we would need to:
    - i. Evaluate the type of business which would be interested in moving to the Devizes Area.
    - ii. Determine what facilities such employers would expect and set about providing them. This must include educational and training facilities with appropriate courses.
    - iii. Link the private sector with the Council to provide a business centre supplying help with starting up new business. Help with offering incentives such as reduced rents, free recruitment advertising, office space with access to mentors and advisors.

We have identified the necessity of working closely with the Chamber of Commerce which has an excellent basis upon which to build up a really professional networking and support mechanism.

The Wessex Chamber which has recently employed a paid chairman is working in the area to bring the Chambers into line; there is a pot of £1million funding available to the Wessex region in order for them to become self-supporting within three years. We feel this is a realistic aim and we want to see the group expanded and charging a realistic fee for membership that will be used to fund a salaried CEO who will work as a Devizes Ambassador to approach possible employers and work with those who express interest. Ideally, this individual will be based at the proposed business centre and will put together a business prospectus for the area, designed for circulation to businesses that might consider relocating, extolling the advantages of living and working in the Devizes Area.

Although not of economic significance we note and regret an absence of opportunity for disabled members of the workforce. An expansion of larger office based business to the area should help to address this issue.

## Education

Devizes schools have currently very tenuous links with the town. This is detrimental on several levels and has a considerable effect on the local economy.

- An under-performing school will deter higher income families from moving into catchment (as they do with St John's in Marlborough).

- A high achieving school will encourage these people to fight to secure homes within the catchment and they will bring not only their spending power but their entrepreneurship and businesses.
- Local children are being let down by the lack of interaction with local employers and so school leavers are faced with a big gap between school and work.

Our strategy for improving this situation is:

1. Devizes School A level results last year were better than St John's but no one outside the school knew; a strong and on-going PR campaign is needed.
2. Work closely with the schools and for the town to take an interest in and ownership of them.
3. Form strong links between private enterprise and the schools. Leading to a mentoring scheme whereby students have regular access to adults who are neither parent nor teacher. Individuals or small groups of students being given experience of work leading to holiday or Saturday work and ideally to training or apprenticeships. The mentoring to be both pre and post school leaving. Such action would have a further benefit in helping to produce a stream of confident, articulate young people to staff these and potentially start their own new businesses.

## Tourism

Devizes as a tourist destination is sorely undersold. The Devizes Tourism Partnership estimates that the value to the area of tourism currently is £30 million. Our geographical location at the heart of this very special county within two hours of London means that we have many excellent attractions that we need to begin exploiting.

- We need to work closely with Visit Wiltshire and with local enterprise to establish a new information / travel centre within the town.
- We must increase awareness of what we have to offer. Publicity in the form of a really good, up to date website is essential and we absolutely need to begin linking our assets; from hotels and bed and breakfasts to restaurants, boat and bike hire, walking tours, historical and artistic venues, our culture of festival and carnivals and so on.
- It is really important that we show how user friendly the town is and how easy it is to get here. We would like to see a range of tours, starting with two day events, involving as wide a variety of local businesses as possible. This will enable us to work on marketing, identifying potential visitors, tying up contributors and forming a good solid base upon which to build up this vital industry.
- High on the list is transport. For a tourist town without a railway station, a coach park is essential. The two currently operating in Devizes (Station Road and The Wharf) are manifestly unsuitable. Neither has facilities, nor is close enough to the town centre. We have identified the old NHS site on New Park Street as an ideal location. This needs to be explored thoroughly. Devizes is close enough to other major tourist attractions to be

included in coach tours (e.g. Bath, Salisbury, Stonehenge and Avebury). The addition of a centrally located coach park with facilities would enable fresh approaches to be made to tour companies to include Devizes on their itineraries.

- British Waterways has been looking at ways of making its Caen Hill site more attractive to tourists; they should be encouraged to do so. Private enterprise has already demonstrated that more can be made from the canal; the example being the new marina at Lower Foxhangers.

By increasing tourism we could expect to create many more jobs and therefore more locally produced wealth.

## Preserving Existing Jobs in Retail & Service Sectors

The loss of jobs in the public sector will impinge on the retail and service sectors in the area.

Whilst our proposals for creating employment in the private sector will ensure business for the retail sector, this will take time and we should not rely on this alone. We are proposing a number of initiatives: -

- i. E-retailing is perceived as a threat to high streets. Some are being successful in countering it by making shopping in their High Street a pleasant experience. Retailers need to be mindful of the appearance of their environment, we would like to encourage more of a 'café society' in our retail centre making it far more attractive and welcoming all year round. Devizes has a number of individual and independent shops; we need to promote this factor which makes Devizes a positive retail destination and one which they will want to return to.
- ii. With the demise of the DDP, a strong Chamber of Commerce is essential. As mentioned in relation to employment we plan to work closely with the Chamber to recruit and work with a paid Director/CEO.
- iii. With the closure and selling of Browfort (with the attendant loss of jobs), the property does lend itself to a business venue very much more than a residential home for the elderly. It has the infrastructure, including parking required to become a really viable location for a large, white collar business or indeed business centre. This will bring in both new jobs and workers within walking distance of the shops.

## Devizes Parkway

Devizes remains comparatively isolated compared with its local competitors. The principal reason for this is lack of a rail connection. Yet a main line track runs just three miles away at Lydeaway. A station there would dramatically reduce travelling time to London, a significant issue in attracting new businesses and every effort should be made to persuade the Rail Authorities to investigate the possibility of this being built and paid for using money from 106 Agreements on new housing and commercial land.

## Summarising

We need a three-pronged approach with each prong having a clearly defined strategy and targets. The result of the strategy outlined in this document would be to

- increase the town's confidence and ability to support itself whilst looking for national and international market opportunities
- increase national and international awareness of Devizes at both a tourist and business destination
- to build on the areas economic diversity and its ability to generate wealth for the community at large

For such a policy to work it needs a clearly focused strategy, investment from private enterprise and make good use of the vast business experience of those people who have retired to the Devizes area and have business experience to share.

## Health & Wellbeing

### Introduction

This plan seeks to address local health and social care issues within the Devizes Community Area by linking to Local Area Agreements and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in order to identify and deliver projects to further improve the health and wellbeing of the community.

Devizes has a wide range of health services. Increasing demand on those services cannot always be met by statutory providers, hence the development of an Independent Sector Treatment Centre at Marshall Road, Devizes, providing elective day surgery for residents of Wiltshire. Our population is also expanding and the demographics trend is toward an older population. For both these reasons the area will require additional resources over the period covered by this plan.

### Retention of Local Health Services

We are committed to working for the retention, enhancement and expansion of existing community health services to meet the increased demand of a growing and ageing population, through early engagement with the new Clinical Commissioning Groups, and by the continued provision in the Community Area of:

- Additional GP facilities to meet the demand of our expanding population. Also with consideration in the future of co-locating those facilities on one easy access site
- A strong Neighbourhood Team base i.e. multi-disciplinary community healthcare teams delivering care to patients in their own homes.
- An adequate Health Visitor Service
- Access to an adequate emergency dental treatment service
- Podiatry
- Paediatric clinic
- Mental health services
- School Nursing Services
- Community Midwives (antenatal and postnatal)
- Sexual Health Services
- Family Planning
- X-ray service
- Physiotherapy
- Obstetrics
- Gynaecology
- Dermatology

- Rheumatology
- Geriatrics
- Continence service
- Orthopaedics

In our view it is essential that as many of these services as possible are delivered at local clinics with specialists from our major hospitals. This will serve a number of purposes: -

1. It will ease the very considerable burden of patients having to travel long-distances to a main hospital
2. It will reduce the cost of attending a clinic
3. It will assist us in meeting our commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by eliminating a large number of journeys which will otherwise have to take place.

## **Communicating Service Availability to the Public**

The 'signposting' of services and clear communication with the public about the services available is essential and a variety of different media and locations should be used to achieve this. Such communications should include as a minimum: -

- Out of Hours services
- Treatment for chronic conditions.
- NHS dentistry
- Complementary therapies
- Sexual health advice
- Maternity support
- Drug dependency support

## **Counselling Services**

Counselling services should be provided locally, particularly for those of school age and their families, and for adults with on-going mental health needs.

We also wish to see continued funding to support the implementation of the Wiltshire 'End of life strategy' and 'Carers' strategy' for people of all ages. This is to include commitment by agencies and statutory bodies to respond to needs identified by the Rural Needs initiative, with provision of domiciliary and respite care to match increased demand.

## **Public Health Issues**

We will work to reduce childhood obesity by providing a range of activities to encourage healthy and active lifestyles for all ages, and to publicise these effectively in order to engage children and parents



in the issues and opportunities. This includes support for a safe cycle network for both town and villages.

We will also support town and parish councils in providing leisure and exercise facilities in village halls and on open spaces.

We are concerned to protect the current and future health of people living in, working in, and visiting the Devizes Community Area by supporting and monitoring the work of Partner agencies to reduce the causes of air pollution in Devizes.

# Housing & Built Environment

## Preamble

Devizes is a popular place to live but has been subjected to over development. There is a need to rebalance the infrastructure and the community to form a sound base for future growth.

## Executive Summary

- 1. Neighbourhood Plans** – Local councils must work together so that plans are consistent with the 2012 -2026 Core Strategy.
- 2. Housing Targets** - The Wiltshire Local Plan target of 2,150 houses by 2026 is endorsed. There is a balance of 610 to be provided during the plan period with the emphasis to be put on improving the infrastructure and employment opportunities before any significant development.
- 3. Affordable Housing** - Devizes has a housing imbalance with empty new build properties and more than 1200 households seeking housing that they can afford. Priority should be given to providing more affordable homes. If developers fail to address this need then Wiltshire should work with housing associations to meet it.
- 4. Affordable Housing in The Villages** is a particular problem and cause of disquiet. DCAP proposes to set up a working group to identify solutions that have worked elsewhere.
- 5. Employment Led Housing** - Devizes housing is not expensive compared with surrounding localities. The main reason that local residents cannot afford housing is the low wage economy. Attention should be paid to attracting entrepreneurs to generate the growth that encourages a skilled, well paid workforce that can afford current house prices.
- 6. Infrastructure Assessment** - National forecasts indicate that there will be major growth in the 16 to 26 and 70+ age groups. This supports the argument for more affordable, low occupancy housing. There needs to be a balance between the provision of supported housing for the elderly and independent housing for healthy seniors.
- 7. Sustainable Housing – Air Quality & Traffic Congestion** - Air quality and traffic congestion are at unacceptable levels. Air quality is both measurable and has European standards. Wiltshire has invested in a Devizes traffic model that can forecast the effects that future developments will have on both air quality and congestion. Proposed future developments must be tested for their effects on air quality and congestion.
- 8. Sustainable Housing – Car Parking** - The national restriction put on car parking spaces on new developments to limit the growth in motor vehicles has failed. The Wiltshire Transport Plan 2011 – 2026 sets out realistic parking space requirements for future developments.

**9. Climate Change - Code for Sustainable Homes** - Government standards are set out in its Code for Sustainable Homes 2006. In 2012 new housing should be constructed to all minimum standards and meet the provisions of level Code 3. This should be improved to Code 4 by 2016.

**10. Kennet & Avon Canal** - The canal is an under-utilised asset but in the current financial environment will require private capital.

**11. Heritage** – The area benefits from a very considerable heritage of buildings. We wish to see significant empty buildings restored, albeit with a change of use. We also recognise the pressure on our Council to cut its conservation budget and urge that the community be enabled to play a larger part.

## Introduction

Devizes is a popular place to live. The 2011 DCAP Consultation Survey identified that 81.9% of residents do not wish to move away from the area. The heart of the town is a conservation area. The Wiltshire Local Plan called for the provision of 2,150 new houses in the twenty year period 2006 - 2026 but 1,540, 71.6% of them have been completed, or have been given planning permission, in the first five years. Over the period 2001 to 2010, Devizes Community Area population growth was 11.3%, considerably higher than the Wiltshire average of 6.3%. (Devizes Joint Strategic Assessment 2011) This rapid housing development has not proved to be sustainable as it has outpaced the ability of the community to absorb the demands these changes have created: Devizes has neither a railway station nor a bypass, consequently transportation needs can only be met by motor vehicles. DCAP is fully aware of the on-going needs of a growing population so the housing challenge facing the Town and its surrounding Villages is to rebalance its infrastructure, both physical and social, whilst providing additional housing to meet the needs of an emerging community. **This is primarily the responsibility of Wiltshire Council but they must be supported by local councils working together to produce Neighbourhood Plans that are consistent with the 2006 - 2026 Core Strategy and by the Coalition Government ensuring that Localism allows for the wishes of a responsible, planned community.**

## Housing, Targets & Land Allocation

By 2026 Devizes is required to have met its housing requirements forecast in the Wiltshire Local Plan 2006-2026. Housing development has been piecemeal, with developers taking advantage of the Governments desire to build houses without consideration of the effects that the scale and rate of growth has had on the community. Much of the housing development that has taken place has been in Roundway Parish. At a Parish public meeting in March 2011 the majority of those present had believed that they lived in Devizes not Roundway: There was an absence of any sense of community other than in the village of Roundway itself. Given the issues that need to be addressed it is anticipated that in the short term housing development will take place on brownfield sites with any larger scale developments taking place later in the plan period when it can be demonstrated that the Area is falling behind the requirements of the Core Strategy and when the Area's infrastructure and sustainability issues have been resolved. The outstanding new housing

requirement to meet the 2150 target is 610 dwellings in the period 2011 to 2026, an annualised rate of 41 per year.

Wiltshire Council has appointed an Empty Houses Officer with the remit to focus on properties that have been vacant for 6 months or more and where the owners were claiming council tax discount. In December 2011 there were 120 such empty homes in the Community Area, the equivalent of almost 3 years development provision. These figures address the Community Area requirement. The share of Devizes Town is 410 in the Plan period. There is therefore no need to consider any large scale developments that would encroach upon greenfield sites adjacent to the Town.

The emphasis should be on growing local communities, encompassing infrastructure, employment, transportation, and housing in that order. With a rising world population and increasing fuel prices the country will need to be more self-reliant in feeding itself. Care will need to be exercised when considering whether greenfield sites should be used for building development and whether better use can be made of brownfield sites. **Responsibility for achieving these goals lies with Wiltshire Council's Spatial Planning Department, to deliver a sustainable Core Strategy that meets the requirements of Devizes throughout the 2006 – 26 plan period and its Strategic Housing Department to make best use of the available dwellings.**

## Affordable Housing

The Devizes Joint Strategic Assessment 2011 identified affordable housing as being one of the major housing issues facing the Town. Furthermore, it breaks down the number of applicants registered on the housing register with 863 single bedroom and 344 two bedroom dwellings being sought. The proportion of its population being of working age is 58%, the lowest in the County. Devizes has a higher percentage of persons of retirement age, and over, than the national average, 23.1% against 19.1%. Over the past 10 years developers have preferred to build the larger houses that generate higher profit margins. This has ignored the population demographics and has consequently changed the structure of the community. As a result, there has been an undesirable increase in commuting from Devizes to other centres of employment; a significant growth in the housing register waiting list to 1,369 households and empty, unsold new build larger houses on current developments. The DCAP 2011 Consultation Survey showed that 1 in 6 households were occupied by three or more adults and that the main reason was the cost of housing. Quotas for the number of affordable homes required to be built in developments have eased the problem but have clearly not done enough. There are economic and social reasons for higher levels of affordable homes to be provided as current house prices are beyond the reach of so many young families.

Another of the key drivers of the growth in demand for housing is the increasing longevity of the population combined with healthcare policies that encourage the elderly to live in the community. Planned housing provision for the elderly has been in care homes that presume some level of support being required by residents and hence requiring on-going service charges. This overlooks those independent senior couples who are fit and healthy but wish to downsize in order to minimise living costs. Housing developments focussed on the elderly should offer both supported and independent accommodation. This creates a ripple effect with occupants of such developments vacating the larger homes required by growing families. There is a strong argument that housing for

the elderly should be in centrally located apartments close to essential shops. The social nature of shopping and its importance in helping the elderly to remain independent should not be overlooked.

Plans that do not provide sufficient affordable homes in new developments will not be meeting the needs of a responsible community. All future housing developments should have 50% or more affordable homes until the number of applicants on the housing register has been reduced to 500. Priorities should then be reviewed.

With Wiltshire Council having to trim its budgets as part of the Coalition's austerity measures the public sector may not be able to consider investing in affordable social housing. Market forces may lead developers to construct lower cost housing where there is a proven market but this is uncertain. **There is therefore a strong argument for the council to work closely with housing associations to utilise brownfield sites, council owned land and the conversion of older buildings for the provision of the affordable homes that Devizes should have in the Plan period, 2012 - 2026.**

## Affordable Housing in the Villages

Housing development in the villages is limited and strictly controlled, especially in the AONB. Dwellings in the villages carry a price premium over similar properties in the town and its immediate environs. There are frequent complaints from villagers that their children and the elderly have difficulty finding suitable homes that they can afford without having to leave their villages. There has been a particular problem with social housing where priority has been given to outsiders whose needs have been judged to be greater. **DCAP proposes to work with the village's Parish Councils to identify solutions through the setting up of a working group to investigate a range of solutions that have worked elsewhere.**

## Employment Led Housing

Contrary to opinion, Devizes property is not expensive when compared with housing costs in adjoining areas. The table below has been extracted from the Home.co.uk web site:

**Current (Nov 2011) Average House Prices for 3 Bedroom House**

Location	House Price	Percentage of Devizes Price
Devizes	£201,456	100%
Wiltshire	£211,478	105%
Somerset	£228,468	113%
Hampshire	£280,833	139%
Oxfordshire	£295,444	147%
Dorset	£315,430	157%
Berkshire	£320,004	159%

The limit on mortgage borrowing is a multiple of the applicants' earnings. It is clear that Devizes residents who cannot afford housing have below average earnings. This in turn reflects the type of jobs available in the town.

The DCAP 2011 Survey showed that 43.2% of residents in employment travelled more than 10 miles to get to their place of work and 36.2% spent half an hour or more travelling to work. These findings together with the lower Devizes house prices confirm the wide spread belief that Devizes is becoming a commuter dormitory town. Many commuters shop near their place of work. 27.3% of all respondents shop outside of Devizes each week. 75.3% of residents who shop in other towns do so because they require a wider choice of shops. These are the unwanted consequences of the lack of well-paid employment opportunities. Further early housing development will only accelerate this undesirable process. The future growth of the Town and its surrounding villages should be the result of demand created by a growing, talented, well paid, locally employed workforce revitalising Devizes as a market town. Housing should be provided to attract entrepreneurs and the skilled work force that they require to meet the Economy opportunities identified in this Plan. **Responsibility for the growth of Devizes' economy lies primarily with Wiltshire's Economic Development & Strategic Planning Department with local support from the Devizes Development Partnership, the Devizes Chamber of Commerce and DCAP Itself.**

## Infrastructure Assessment

In order to meet sustainability goals, all new housing should be close enough to transport links and shops to be realistically reachable on foot by the sectors of the community with the greatest housing needs. It should be recognised that this greatest need for housing is concentrated in the 16-26 and 70+ age groups, which nationally represent over 60%, with much of it being for single occupancy accommodation. 49% of respondents to the DCAP 2011 Consultation Survey were over 60 with a further 20.2% aged between 50 and 59. The Household Projections for 2033 produced in November 2010 by the Department of Communities and Local Government forecast that the increase in single occupancy households would constitute two thirds of the total housing growth expected. With Devizes already having an above average proportion of elderly there is every reason to expect it to exceed this figure. There are therefore compelling arguments for not building too many family houses in the early years of this plan. There should be an emphasis on affordable single occupancy homes. If 610 homes are required in total, with 66.7% of them being single occupancy, then 409 of them should be built with the balance of 201 being new larger homes. Additional larger homes will become available from the migration of the older occupants to smaller homes. There is no case for continuing with the large scale, greenfield housing that has been a feature of the last ten years. A cautious approach to building development is advocated. If 610 new homes are to be completed in the 15 years to 2026 and 66.7% are affordable housing then an average annual performance of 41 new houses, 27 of them affordable, would meet the required target. Should this level of provision fail to attract national property developers then housing associations and local builders should be encouraged to meet any shortfall. This level of affordable housing provision will still fail to make a significant impact on the housing register.

Devizes has not had access to the national rail network since 1966 when its station was closed as part of Dr Beeching's rationalisation programme. This has made the Town more reliant on motor transport. With its increased population, many of whom commute, there is a strong case for opening a railway station at Lydeaway or Lavington as suggested in the Transport section of this Plan. However, such an opportunity should not be assessed purely on commuter business, as there are

opportunities to attract freight, incoming rail commuters and for the co-location of business premises adjacent to a station.

Devizes infrastructure is under pressure. The highway deficiencies are addressed in the Transport section but the sewage system is also struggling to cope with the demands created by rapid housing growth. All future developments should be subject to an infrastructure assessment that ensures that transportation, electricity, gas, water, sewage, and drainage services have sufficient capacity and are in place at the beginning of each development. During the Plan period new residents should be able to register with General Practitioners and Dentists with surgeries in Devizes and access to them should meet the levels set out in the Health and Well Being section of this Plan. Teacher pupil ratios should not fall below their 2011 levels. **Whilst Wiltshire Council is not directly responsible for the provision of much of the infrastructure it is accountable for ensuring that planning decisions are consistent with the available or planned infrastructure through its Planning and Public Health Departments.**

## Sustainable Housing - Air Quality & Traffic Congestion

Traffic congestion is a major problem in the town and this plan seeks to encourage the use of other forms of transportation where they are viable. This is unlikely to reduce the number of cars per household so as the number of homes rises so will the number of cars. Air quality is a public health issue for which Wiltshire Council and the Government have a responsibility. Whilst traffic congestion does not have legal standards against which it can be assessed this is not the case for air quality. The European standards are measurable with direct statistical links to public health and ultimately deaths. This suggests that there should be no large scale housing development to meet the 778 requirement until satisfactory air quality management actions are in place, and the frequency of traffic gridlock has been addressed. Wiltshire Council has invested in the development of a Devizes Traffic Model that can forecast both congestion and air quality levels. In order to achieve improvements all development applications must be subject to congestion and pollution assessments using this model. Proposed development sites should be approved only when it can be demonstrated that their effect on the town and its environment does not threaten the health of the community or create increases in traffic congestion. This Community Area Plan encourages cycling as an alternative to motoring. All planning applications for new dwellings should have storage provisions for cycles and show how they connect to the planned cycle network. **Wiltshire's Public Protection Department is ultimately responsible for ensuring that planning decisions do not damage the community's health and well-being. Operation of the Traffic Model and interpretation of its outputs is the responsibility of Wiltshire's Highways and Transport Department. The Coalition Government has a responsibility to ensure that the Planning Inspectorate do not take decisions which exacerbate air quality and consequently public health.**

## Sustainable Housing - Car Parking

Provision of car parking spaces on new developments over the last decade has been subject to Government policy to restrict them in the mistaken belief that such a policy would reduce car ownership and hence usage. The traffic congestion now being experienced and the amount of street parking on recent housing developments are testament that this policy has failed. Indeed, it has

been exacerbated by inadequate living space that has led to the use of garages as storage areas. **Allocated car parking provision for all new homes should, as a minimum, meet the standards set out in paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5 of the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2011 – 2026 Car Parking Strategy.** Developments should also include unallocated visitor parking of at least 0.2 spaces per dwelling, (LTP Table 7.1). These standards are the responsibility of Wiltshire Highways and Transport Department in conjunction with the Planning Department.

## Climate Change - Code for Sustainable Homes

Records show that the average temperature of the planet is rising and is a cause for concern. The Government and Wiltshire Council are committed to reducing greenhouse emissions by 2012. In 2006, the Government issued its Code for Sustainable Homes with the twin objectives of reducing the energy used to construct buildings and that consumed when they are occupied. It sets out standards for nine key parameters and six milestones to address them. Whilst developers will incur additional construction costs, the Government believes that they can be offset as they create a valuable marketing advantage by differentiating their houses and reducing their running costs. **In 2012 new buildings should be constructed to all minimum standards and the Code 3 levels (this is the Government's own target). By 2016 all new developments should meet the Code's level 4 in order to be considered sustainable. Wiltshire's Planning and Building Control Department is responsible for ensuring that planning applications meet the required standards,**

## Kennet & Avon Canal

The Kennet & Avon Canal offers an opportunity to contribute to several of the issues that are concerning Devizes. The 250 berth Caen Hill Marina at Foxhangers demonstrates that private capital has confidence in the canal's future in the leisure market. There are further opportunities at the Caen Flight, including the Diamond Jubilee Wood Project, (British Waterways) and Devizes Wharf (Wiltshire and Devizes Councils), with the Flight addressing leisure, tourism and employment and the Wharf leisure, tourism, employment and housing. **There is the opportunity to create a waterside community that becomes the life blood of the canal.** In the current economic climate, the role of Wiltshire Council should be to plan, encourage, and facilitate appropriate development of the canal and adjoining land aided by British Waterways, Devizes Town Council, Devizes Chamber of Commerce, and DCAP. Whilst acquiring finance will not be easy, with well-planned visitor attractions it should be possible to attract private investment. **British Waterways should reconsider their earlier approach of seeking to obtain lottery funding and investigate how they can partner with the private sector to progress the Caen Flight as a leisure park.**

## Our Heritage

The community is passionate about the rich heritage of our area. Devizes itself has nearly 500 listed buildings, one of the highest in England, whilst many of our villages are conservation areas. We wish to see historic buildings conserved as far as possible. Where significant heritage buildings, such as Devizes Assize Courts are redundant, we wish to see every effort being made to save and restore the structure; we accept that the use has to change.

Monitoring of listed buildings and conservation areas is a significant role for the local authority. Some of this burden could be taken by the community. We acknowledge the excellent and significant role played by the Trust for Devizes, but are also aware that conservation areas outside the town do not enjoy the same level of attention. We would like to see the role of the community extended to cover the whole area and believe that this would be of significant benefit.

# Transport

## Executive Summary

This strategy concentrates on measures that the community can realistically take to reduce traffic and its impacts on the health of our community. It puts forward practical suggestions that do not involve large sums of public money.

- 1. Awareness-raising** - Whilst much of this report requires action by the Council, we accept that much of our congestion is caused by avoidable local car journeys and we propose that attention be focussed on getting this message across to our residents. We argue that a travel information point is an essential tool to get this campaign off the ground.
- 2. Travel Plans** - We have put forward a number of ideas for reducing commuter traffic through Green Travel Plans, focusing particularly on the large employers in Devizes
- 3. Reducing car-use and cycling** – We focus our attention on reducing the school run and on encouraging cycling and walking by ensuring we have comprehensive and safe cycling and walking routes.
- 4. Public Transport** - Going hand in hand with reducing car use are improvements to public transport. We suggest ways in which these might be achieved and urge a new look at community-led schemes that help overcome social exclusion and address the needs of an ageing population. We also highlight the inadequacy of travel information and stress the need for adequate funding for public transport, even if by unpopular means.
- 5. Land Use Planning** - New developments creating yet more traffic along our most congested roads are an on-going threat. We argue for a more thorough assessment of the impact on traffic of any development, prior to a planning decision. A route for a relief road around Devizes town centre and its impact should be properly considered and if agreed the route should be protected. We also argue for more protection from HGV traffic through our villages.
- 6. Rail** – The area suffers from not having a local railway station. Given the Government's positive attitude to new rail links we believe now is the time to consider a Parkway station along the Pewsey to Westbury line close to Devizes. The first steps are to undertake a feasibility study with Network Rail and improve integration of buses and local train stations.

If acted on energetically and in combination, we conclude that these actions will have a significant benefit for the quality of life in the Devizes area.

## Preamble

Transport is an important factor in the health of any community. Modern life requires a high level of mobility. It is also true that society has become too dependent on the motor car, with undesirable results. These include social exclusion for those without a car; harmful pollution of our atmosphere and a major contribution to global warming.

The town of Devizes suffers from a high level of traffic congestion with air quality levels close to or above the level considered by the World Health Organisation and the EU as harmful to public health; whilst many of our rural communities have inadequate public transport provision.

The problems we face are not easily solved. They affect our quality and way of life. Our National Government is predicting a significant increase in traffic levels over the period up to 2026. We have little or no local powers to force change. It is probable that for much of the period covered by this plan our national finances will be such as to rule out expensive solutions. Significant as these obstacles are, they do not and must not constitute a reason for doing nothing. Working together as a community, we can make a difference.

This document is the first phase of our community plan; it will be followed by an action plan aimed at achieving the goals we have set here and then, working together with the Council and other partners, carrying out those actions.

## Introduction

The development of this strategy has been driven by a number of factors. Probably the most significant is the acceptance that little, if anything, can be done to expand the local highway network in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to reduce the current levels of high roadside air pollution and lessen our carbon footprint. There is little doubt that the best way of achieving this is to improve the public transport network which will also be effective in tackling the issue of social exclusion which results from inadequate levels of public transport

Our transport problems are impacting many areas of life which are covered by other thematic groups. In particular they affect our economy, tourism, our health and well-being. Most significantly, they impact on housing provision because of the necessity of ensuring our compliance with national air quality standards.

Throughout our deliberations we have sought to ensure that our aims are both practical and attainable.

## The Highway Network

Devizes has grown very considerably in this millennium. The number of new homes and their location has been decided without the benefits of a computer traffic model. The one produced in 2006 proved to be so inaccurate that it had to be abandoned. One of the goals in our first draft of this document was a new and reliable model and we are delighted that this has now been achieved.

**It is a key component of this strategy that all proposed developments are modelled to predict how they will impact on congestion (and therefore pollution) and that such developments should only be sited where they will have the least impact on traffic congestion. Developments should be refused if the results fail the test for legal limits on grounds of air quality.**

The relationship between traffic levels and congestion is an exponential one; a small reduction in traffic will bring about a much larger reduction in congestion and vice versa. We are hopeful that small improvements can be achieved by making some relatively minor changes to the network. If sufficient of these can be identified and implemented the overall result could be a significant reduction in congestion. We are able to report an early small success, with the decision to relocate

the built-out bus stop on Estcourt Street to enable it to be placed on the existing pathway so that, whilst traffic flow will be restricted when a bus is at the stop, it will not, as now, cease altogether.

We intend that our work in identifying other pinch points will continue and we anticipate asking Wiltshire Highways to examine the cost-benefits of further options.

If the population of Devizes continues to increase and traffic increases in line with the national forecast, the level of highway improvements that can be made will prove inadequate to deal with the additional traffic generated. **It is imperative then that the issue of a relief road be considered, even if it is unaffordable in the present economic climate. If one or more routes are selected, these should be protected from future development<sup>3</sup>.**

Traffic congestion within Devizes impacts a number of other communities within the area. Some are seeing an increase in traffic as motorists seek out rat-runs that avoid the town and are fearful that any further restrictions within the town will exacerbate this situation. Most suffer from a poorer public transport service as delays make services less reliable and more expensive to operate.

However, the main issue for the rural communities is that of HGV traffic using roads that are manifestly unsuitable. The situation had been made worse by an increase in the use of Satellite Navigation with many HGV drivers using standard Sat-Navs intended for car use.

**We wish to see more use of the powers to ban HGVs from using our village streets as short cuts and to have clearly signed and published lorry routes through the area.**

## Reducing Road Traffic

Whilst we believe small measures will be of some benefit, we accept that there is little chance of any highway improvements increasing the highway capacity to absorb the predicted increase in traffic, let alone accommodate the traffic generated by the additional homes planned.

There is a viable option which lies within the power of the local community to implement. Around 70% of our traffic is local, i.e. it originates from Devizes, terminates in Devizes, or both. Many of these journeys can be eliminated by using alternative modes such as walking, cycling, public transport or, alternatively by simply reducing the number of journeys. In considering realistic targets for a reduction in local car journeys, we are aware of the likely increase in such by an ageing population who are less able to walk far, to carry shopping and to cycle.

**We believe that a target to reduce car use by 5% within the period of this plan is an achievable goal<sup>4</sup>.**

If we are to achieve this target we need to use all available resources to induce a modal shift away from the motor car to other modes of transport. Our strategy for achieving this comprises a number of key activities: -

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<sup>3</sup> For example, a route could take traffic out of the town from London Road to Shanes Castle

<sup>4</sup> The degree to which this would reduce congestion can be seen by the difference between term-time and school holiday traffic, since 5% is approximately the proportion generated by the 'school run'.

## Reducing commuting by motor vehicle

Public bodies account for around 22% of employment in the area, making it by far the largest sector. It seems logical then that the lead in reducing car commuting should be taken by this sector. There is ample evidence that well-structured and strongly promoted Green Travel initiatives have a major effect. Many reward staff for abandoning their motor cars in favour of the bicycle or public transport to good effect. They also encourage car-sharing. Using such initiatives Buckinghamshire County Council managed a reduction in car commuting by over 20% for example<sup>5</sup>.

Car use by public bodies is by no means limited to commuting; many “business” journeys are made during the day. Indeed, where car owners are offered a high rate of recompense for using their cars on business, this can act as an incentive to bring the car to work. There are a number of steps employers can take to reduce car use during the day. These include making bicycles available for short journeys, having a pool of electric vehicles and running regular minibus services between offices where the amount of travel warrants it; also limiting car mileage rates to the level of public transport journeys.

With the public sector leading the way, we wish to see all significant employers take advantage of all the ‘smart-travel’ options available to reducing car commuting.

**A key objective in this strategy is to see all major employers pursuing a vigorous green travel policy with the intention of achieving an appreciable reduction in car use by their employees.**

## Local People and Businesses to take responsibility

The Traffic Model shows that the majority of traffic circulating in Devizes is locally generated. Many journeys are very short and could easily be made on foot or by bicycle, whilst others need not be made at all. Yet few Devizes residents see themselves as having any responsibility for congestion.

**We recognise the barriers to walking, cycling and going by bus, but if we are to achieve our goal of reducing traffic we need to convince our fellow residents to take their share of responsibility and we must develop a strategy for doing so.**

To reduce shopping trips we need to ensure that local shops and services are well supported. Shopping trips can also be reduced if local retailers offer a delivery service. People will be more inclined to walk or cycle to the shops if they do not have to carry the shopping home. Whilst many retailers offer on-line shopping with delivery, the same is not always true for those who wish to shop in person. **It is possible for the local retailers to cooperate in providing a local delivery service, which we believe, would prove self-financing.**

Marketing campaigns elsewhere in Wiltshire, targeting individual households matching people to travel opportunities have proved effective. **This strategy will explore personalised travel planning a campaign in new housing areas such as Quakers Walk.**

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<sup>5</sup> [Making Travel Plans to Work – Department for Transport 2002.](#)

## Reducing the “School Run”

Devizes schools have made positive strides in reducing car use, but they could do better. The proportion of children using cars or taxis to get to school is higher in the Devizes Area than in Wiltshire as a whole. **We would like to see all our schools implement up-to-date travel plans and put walking, cycling and car-sharing initiatives in place.**

Cycling to school is one obvious way of reducing car use. Children have the opportunity to learn to cycle safely through the Bikeability scheme, but there is a shortage of safe cycling routes so most eschew this means of transport. A typical complaint is the unsuitability of the canal towpath to reach the new school at Quakers Walk. **Our strategy is to create safe-cycling routes, consider appropriate infrastructure and to launch a new initiative under the Bike-IT scheme (see below).**

## Cycling

Cycling is to be particularly encouraged since it has the dual benefit of decreasing traffic and providing healthy exercise. It is the travel mode most favoured by those considering changing from car mode. If children become active cyclists they are more likely to continue as an adult.

Devizes is relatively flat but lacks a safe and comprehensive cycle network. The cycleways it has are fragmented, end at some of the more dangerous points and the towpath is in urgent need of repair. **A comprehensive network of safe cycling routes would, we believe, contribute significantly to modal change and, as such, should be given a high priority. Whilst routes in the town should be tackled first, safe cycle routes should extend to the surrounding villages and countryside.**

**Advantage should be taken of the Bike-IT initiative to encourage both children and parents to adopt cycling as their preferred choice of transport<sup>6</sup>.**

**New developments must consider the needs of cyclists and link with existing cycleways wherever possible.**

## Walking

Walking is the mode of choice for many commuters. It is healthy and ‘green’ and, as such, needs to be strongly encouraged. According to the 2011 DCAP Community Survey, 23% of employees already walk to work. Walking can be hazardous and unsafe where overgrown hedges have reduced the footpath and where the surface is uneven. In winter, icy surfaces become an additional hazard. **Safe walking routes will encourage more people to leave the car at home. Such routes should be identified, brought up to the necessary standard and maintained.**

## Public Transport

Good public transport services are essential to our strategy for a reduction in car use, to reduce social inclusion and improve access for all ages and physical abilities. Our aims are: -

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on Bike-IT see <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/bike-it/bike-it-and-our-school>

- (1) To ensure that the bus becomes an option of first consideration rather than as a mode of last resort
- (2) To ensure that people in the Community Area are provided with a bus network that can reduce peak time traffic, impact favourably on air quality, improve mobility without over-reliance on the private car and reduce social exclusion. This in turn requires the development of options so that Devizes is well linked to its surrounding villages, suburbs, nearest large towns, railway stations and hospitals.

There are three areas which are of particular concern to us: -

### Public Bus Services

With a few exceptions the current bus network is under-used. The reasons for this lack of take-up of the services on offer are complex. Responses to the DCAP Public Consultation Questionnaire about what would make people more likely to choose a 'green travel' option produced five factors in relation to bus services. In order of popularity these were:

- Bus routes to where I want to go
- More frequent buses
- Better bus timetable information
- More evening and Sunday services
- Cheaper Fares

We recognize the problem facing bus service providers which is very much a 'chicken and egg' issue. If more people travel, more frequent services can be supported and additional routes can be introduced. However, if the services are infrequent, do not go to where people want to travel, or do not run into the evenings, making the return journey impossible, then people will not use buses and the services will be cut for want of sufficient passengers. It is imperative that we find a way of breaking this vicious cycle.

We believe that a partnership approach by both the community and the service providers will prove advantageous in achieving the maximum benefit to all parties, including wheel chair users. If the community is made aware of issues surrounding a service that might result in it being cut, there will be opportunity to seek ways of increasing ridership or, if this were not possible, ensuring that the necessary changes to timetables are well publicised. **To this end, we wish to work closely with Service Providers and users through the Association of Devizes Passengers.**

A good starting point is to address the third factor in the list above, travel information, since it can be improved at little cost. If the answers to the consultation are borne out in practice, such improvements will result in increased passenger numbers. **Therefore, it is a matter of great concern that our area does not have adequate up to date bus information about its services.**

Our strategy for increasing bus ridership is one of partnership and engagement: -

- (1) Strong engagement with all large employers, particularly those public bodies that are located in Devizes with the object of providing additional passengers on key routes as part of an arrangement between the bus operators and these employers.**
- (2) Engagement and negotiations with all parties to ensure that the bus, or taxi-bus, network is relevant to the needs of the travelling public.**
- (3) Access to up to date, comprehensive, accurate public transport information for the whole area on-line, by phone, smart phone, at the bus stop and at face-to-face information points.**

## Rural & Community Bus Services

Without a bus service our rural communities have fewer travel choices. However we recognise that these are expensive to provide. Wiltshire Council operates the Connect 2 service which covers some, but not all, of the communities in our area. We are unconvinced that the present system of employing a remote call centre at very considerable cost is the best way of operating this service. **A complete review of the benefits of a centralised system should be undertaken and, working with the Parish Councils, a number of alternatives should be explored including taxi-buses and locally operated call centre(s).**

A considerable number of our rural communities are too small to ever justify a regular bus service to such a standard that it will find wide acceptance. Yet, without such a service, we will see a rise in social exclusion in our villages as well as traffic from villages. The answer, in part at least, is a community bus service, possibly combined with taxis or taxi-buses, which can play a valuable part in the overall solution. A comprehensive review of existing community bus services and the demand for such should be conducted in each parish. **As a result, an integrated strategy for the future of community and flexible mini-bus services should be produced.**

## Rail Services

The existing rail connections within the area are poor and result in

- a. More long distance car journeys being made.
- b. Cars journeys to access the stations at Chippenham, Swindon, Pewsey, Trowbridge and Westbury.
- c. A disincentive to businesses starting-up in, or moving to the area.

There are two possible options for opening a station within the community area and close enough to Devizes to produce a meaningful shift in travel mode. The first and closest option is at Lydeaway where the Pewsey to Westbury line crosses the A342. Establishing a station there is likely to prove expensive however. A lower cost alternative would be to resurrect the old Lavington Station site (4½ miles from Devizes), which could lend itself more readily to a new development, being on a level site with room to construct a car park and station facilities.

**Given the closeness of a mainline railway to the town, we urge Wiltshire Council to engage with Government, Network Rail and the Train Operator to investigate the feasibility of a Devizes Parkway station and promote it.**

Until such a service is provided, we wish to see rail-bus links to the surrounding stations greatly improved to ensure adequate early morning and evening connections as well as through timetabling and rail-bus tickets.

## Funding Public Transport Initiatives

Whilst effective marketing and service reviews will deliver savings which can be used to improve public transport, this is very likely to be inadequate to make the type of improvements needed to achieve the necessary modal shift away from the car. In our view, it is imperative that adequate funding be found. Funding might come from a number of different sources including new central government programmes, but these are often competitive and short term. Local funds could be generated from local car parking as well. We do not rule out some form of Workplace Parking Levy on large employers, where the sums raised would be used solely to fund better public transport.<sup>7</sup> Such a levy will have a twofold effect, both providing a financial incentive for commuters to change to public transport and a revenue stream to improve that service.

## Conclusions

The actions advocated above are critical to achieving DCAP's overarching aims. We believe this strategy has a good chance of successfully dealing with the problems of too much traffic.

The strategy has been designed to:

- address the physical health and well-being of all age groups and sectors of the community
- reduce traffic volume to an environmentally and economically efficient level
- meet with a degree of public acceptance
- build on measures that have been shown to deliver results
- be seen as fair and appropriate to a market town and rural villages
- Ensure that the local economy is not restrained through poor transport facilities and services.

However, it can only succeed with the positive cooperation of Wiltshire Council and with the agreement of the community at large.

It might be seen by some as “anti-car”. It is not: we accept that cars are essential in rural communities. **Our aim is not to reduce car ownership, but to reduce car use.** The option to do nothing is not an alternative - unless we succeed in achieving a significant modal shift we will see further increases in traffic congestion which, in turn, will result in an increasing deterrent to tourism and trade.

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<sup>7</sup> The Workplace Parking Levy can be raised by a Local Authority on parking spaces provided for parking vehicles used for the purpose of travelling to and from work. It is usual to set a minimum number of spaces per business to exempt small employers (typically 10 spaces). It is worth noting that if 400 workplace parking bays raised just £2 per working day this would amount to approximately £200,000 per annum