

# THE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF CATHEDRAL CITIES AND HISTORIC TOWNS

## WARWICK CASE STUDY

by *Green Balance*



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### Special qualities

Warwick is a town of 31,000 people on the River Avon, now largely joined to Royal Leamington Spa to its east. Nikolaus Pevsner describes Warwick in the 'Buildings of England' series for *Warwickshire* (1966) as "a perfect county town", which "is a case of ideal co-existence between two outstanding visual treasures" – Warwick Castle and the town itself. The Castle competes with Windsor to be the finest mediaeval castle in the land, and is certainly a hugely impressive structure (Figure 1). After a major fire in 1694 which wiped out most of the mediaeval timber-framed buildings in the town centre, Warwick was rebuilt in stone and brick on the original street pattern. Daniel Defoe is quoted as writing in 1716 "Warwick is now rebuilt in so noble and beautiful a manner that few towns in England make so fine an appearance"<sup>1</sup>, a view many will share today (Figure 2).



Fig. 1 Warwick Castle: "one of the great sights of England" from Castle Bridge (Alec Clifton-Taylor<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Alec Clifton-Taylor, 1981, *Six More English Towns*, BBC.



Fig. 2 Northgate Street: “the most handsome Georgian street in the Midlands” (Alec Clifton-Taylor<sup>1</sup>)

The town grew up predominantly on the north bank of the River Avon, out of the flood zone, while the Castle estate controlled a swathe of land on the south bank as a Castle Park. In 1793 the Earl of Warwick built a new bridge over the river to take the Banbury Road (as



the existing one beneath the castle was found unsafe – and was largely washed away shortly afterwards). He negotiated with the town to pay for three quarters of the cost if allowed to extend the castle grounds to the new line of the road 250m to the east. The new Banbury Road was screened from the Park by tree planting up to 50m deep, and landscaped by Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown as part of the Park enhancements: it was taken on a direct line up a hill to the south and aligned on the spire of St Nicholas Church. A bend on the brow of the hill created the beginning of a spectacular entrance route to the town for those approaching from the south (Figure 3), through countryside but with the Castle screened until the last moment when it comes into view from the bridge (Figure 1). The Grade 1 listed Park and Garden extends to c280 hectares (Figure 4).

Fig. 3 Approach to Warwick on the Banbury Road from the south, aligned on St Nicholas Church





Fig. 4 Castle Park from Guy's Tower, Warwick Castle (Bridge End village in middle distance)

### Recent heritage policy and development practice

The development plan setting out policies for development and heritage (and other matters) in Warwick is the Warwick District Local Plan 1996-2011, adopted in September 2007. Almost all its policies have been saved, pending adoption of an emerging Local Plan. The context for local planning at the time was the Warwickshire Structure Plan (adopted August 2002) which allocated 8,000 dwellings to Warwick District 1996-2011, and the Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (adopted June 2004) which provided countywide housing objectives 2011-2021 but not district objectives. Government advice, as an interim measure until revised district figures were produced, was to apply the proportionate distribution between districts used in the Structure Plan to the regional guidance figure. This gave Warwick District a housing objective of 4,624 dwellings 2001-2011. In practice, in the buoyant area housing market, 3,324 dwellings had been built between 2001 and 2005, leaving just 1,300 to be supplied 2005-2011. Existing unimplemented planning permissions at 2005 substantially exceeded this requirement, and the Council estimated that over 4,000 additional dwellings would be built by 2011. There was therefore no need to allocate any further land for new housing.

The effect of the Local Plan was therefore to hold back housing supply against demand in the Warwick area, though allowance was made for continued land recycling when sites became available for redevelopment. In these cases Policy DP5 on minimum net densities applied (50 dwellings per hectare [dph] in town centres and near public transport interchanges, 30 dph elsewhere), though the market habitually delivered higher densities. The Council considers that schemes within the town centre have been redeveloped

appropriately in relation to heritage despite being highly sensitive historically. This is not a matter on which local amenity organisations have focused (other than in design terms).

The heritage policies of the 2007 Local Plan address typical specific issues (e.g. Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens). Policy DAP8 on Protection of Conservation Areas expects development to respect the setting of Conservation Areas (which cover almost the whole of central Warwick and the Castle Park), and important views both in and out of them. However, there is no other reference to heritage as a strategic issue in relation to wider development and growth questions. Like policy on density, policy on design is also handled elsewhere in the Plan rather than under the heritage heading: promoting high quality and sustainable design and enhancing the built environment is an objective of the Plan, but Policy DP1 Layout and Design to support it gives little specific attention to respecting historical distinctiveness (one of twelve detailed requirements) and there are no formal height controls on new development. The Council considers that its moratorium on housing allocations has nonetheless allowed rigorous application of its heritage policies, and that the 2007 Local Plan has worked really well in heritage terms.

For the heritage of Warwick the elephant in the room so far as this Local Plan is concerned is town centre traffic. Vehicles can access the town centre from all radial directions which imposes very significant levels of traffic on the historic streets throughout the day. In the heart of the town, based around the original East Gate, there is a traffic gyratory (Castle Hill – South Street – St Nicholas Church Street). Air quality in the town centre is correspondingly very poor, and appreciation of the heritage along the main streets is impaired. The Local Plan has none-too-onerous policies on traffic generation by new development (Policy DP7), car parking provision (Policy DP8) and developer contributions to sustainable transport improvements (Policy SC12). The introduction to chapter 7 on Town Centre Policies ignores traffic in relation to Warwick, as does Policy TCP8 Warwick Town Centre Mixed Use Area. Instead the emphasis is on bringing activity into Warwick town centre and developing the Warwick urban area preferentially ‘to reduce the need to travel’ (paragraph 3.32).

Traffic in Warwick is not a new problem. Back in 1981 Alec Clifton-Taylor introduced his book *Six More English Towns* by noting “The greatest enemy of all these beautiful old towns is undoubtedly traffic: not local traffic, which is seldom a serious menace, but through traffic...”. He reserved special emphasis for Warwick: “The great problem of the future is how to control the volume of traffic. Most of it would appear to be through traffic, and it is already a scourge”, adding half a page of suggestions to tackle it. Since then little has been done to address traffic problems. Proposals in the 2007 Local Plan for a park-and-ride on the A452 southern approach to both Warwick and Leamington have not been implemented and councillors are resistant to parking controls in the town centre. Cycle lanes and pedestrianisation are on a lamentable scale. The de facto method of traffic management is congestion, which finds its own level and discourages the expression of pent-up demand. Emphasis is on improving the capacity of the road network through detailed management rather than inhibiting traffic.

## The planning and development context

### *Councillor priorities*

The authority's priorities are set out in the 31 page Corporate Business Improvement Plan *Fit for the Future* (September 2010) which "brings together the Council's strategies, projects and service area plans into one document". This does not mention anything relating to heritage, despite the heritage significance of regency Leamington, Kenilworth with its castle, Stoneleigh Abbey and much else within the District as well as Warwick itself. Councillors clearly appreciate the economic significance of both Warwick Castle (a high-price tourist destination privately operated by Merlin Entertainments) and the town centre for retailing. There is modest acceptance of the importance of heritage. Practical measures include support for Conservation Officer recommendations, an historic building match-funding grant scheme of £0.5m annually, and a Conservation Advisory Forum which engages expert bodies in the District. The District has employed two Conservation Officers for some years.

### *Development allocations in Warwick District*

Housing requirements are the principal consumer of land and the principal source of potential impacts on heritage in Warwick. The scale of house building in the District supported by the Council has changed significantly in recent years, and the moratorium on allocations has been set aside as the new requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework take effect. Councillors are now supportive of housing growth in the District.

The basis for and planned number of dwellings in Warwick District over the period of the new Local Plan (2011-29) has changed as the plan has emerged through its stages.

- (i) The Preferred Options consultation in May 2012 identified a need for 10,800 dwellings (600pa) based on past supply trends.
- (ii) The Revised Development Strategy in June 2013 calculated a need for 12,300 dwellings (683pa) based on the Government's household projections.
- (iii) The Publication Draft in May 2014 (to be considered at Examination in summer 2015) proposed 12,860 dwellings (714pa). This aims to meet the objectively assessed need for housing, but this is now expressed as a share of the subregion's needs rather than the needs specifically of Warwick District (Policies DS2, DS7, DS20 and H0). This is distinctly more than the needs of Warwick District alone, as the District is contributing to meeting some of the needs of Coventry, which that city is struggling to meet within its boundaries.

The approach was agreed by councillors from the sub-regional authorities through the Coventry and Warwickshire and South-East Leicestershire Economic Prosperity Board on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014. Warwick DC agreed to adopt a contributory figure greater than the number indicated for the District in a Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). (The SHMA had been revised in 2014 to take into account revised Sub-National Population Projections from the Office for National Statistics [which were themselves translated into revised household projections in 2015]). An obligation on Warwick which might have been fixed at 606 dwellings annually was concluded at 720, to assist Coventry as part of the statutory 'Duty to Co-operate'. This kept the housing allocation to Warwick District at the

level set earlier in 2014 in the Publication Draft Local Plan. Meeting housing needs generated in other authorities is reasonable provided Warwick District has the capacity to accommodate this scale of development, including taking into account heritage and other impacts. The Council considers that it does have this capacity. Nonetheless, progress with the Local Plan is currently stalled, as the Inspector examining the Plan ruled in the summer of 2015 that Warwick DC should make a higher housing land provision. This was principally to accommodate still more of Coventry's housing requirements, making necessary both liaison with other authorities and considerable further planning assessment.

### *West Midlands Green Belt*

The large majority of the District's rural area lies within the West Midlands Green Belt. This designation covers the northern area (encircling Kenilworth), abutting Warwick and Leamington. It extends around the west side of Warwick and the east side of Leamington. The area outside the Green Belt is only to the south of those two towns and south and east of Whitnash (a town of 8,000 population joined to the south side of Leamington and lying south-east of Warwick). Development pressures are concentrated on this area beyond the Green Belt. A large housing development south of Leamington and west of Whitnash (north of Harbury Lane) was allocated in the 1995 Local Plan and is currently being completed.

The Council's desire to release certain Green Belt sites for urban development has usually not been fulfilled. Land on the north side of Leamington was proposed for housing in the Preferred Options but subsequently not pursued, while in February 2015 the Secretary of State refused a major employment proposal in the north-east of the District at the Coventry and Warwickshire Gateway site (straddling the boundary with Coventry City) following a call-in and public inquiry. Land outside the Green Belt has therefore become the primary focus for land release in the emerging Warwick District Local Plan.

One effect of the redirection of development pressure beyond the Green Belt to the south of Warwick is the likelihood of greater traffic movement through the centres of Warwick and Leamington as commuters travel towards Coventry (and Kenilworth). Had the strategic Green Belt designation not been in place, development might well have taken place preferentially further north, alleviating some impact on the historic centres of Warwick and Leamington.

### Development and heritage in the emerging Local Plan

#### *Major proposed land allocations*

The major land allocations for housing in Warwick District south of the Green Belt have varied at each stage of the emerging Local Plan, though one large site has been common to them all, known as 'West of Europa Way: Myton Garden Suburb', proposed variously for between 1,050 and 1,250 dwellings. Earlier proposals for economic development land on the site have been dropped, and development has been permitted for housing alone. This site is the last remaining major greenfield site between Warwick and Leamington on the south side, between the Technology Park in Warwick to the west and Leamington's Heathcote industrial estate to the east. The site lies on higher ground and will be almost



completely screened from Warwick town centre but visible from the towers of St Mary's Church and the Castle (Figure 5). The other allocations have been as follows:



Fig. 5 Myton Garden Suburb site west of Europa Way, with St Mary's Church tower 2.5km distant

(i) The Preferred Options (May 2013) proposed to allocate principally two adjacent sites known as 'South of Gallows Hill' and 'The Asps'. Both these sites have their western boundaries on the Banbury Road and both have their eastern boundaries on Europa Way (A452). The northern site, South of Gallows Hill (Figures 6 and 7), would fill in the land between the Technology Park and the Banbury Road, on ground rising away from the town. The southern site, The Asps would extend the South of Gallows Hill site to fill in the whole area between Banbury Road (A426) and Europa Way (A452) further south (part in Figure 8).



Fig. 6 South of Gallows Hill site from Guy's Tower, Warwick Castle (Banbury Rd tree screen to right)



Fig. 7 South of Gallows Hill site looking south-east (Technology Park behind screening on left)

(ii) The Revised Development Strategy (June 2013) retained the allocation South of Gallows Hill but omitted The Asps site. Instead it allocated a large site south of Harbury Lane (the south-eastern extension of Gallows Hill), at Lower Heathcote Farm and Grove Farm. This site, 2.5-4.5km distant from St Mary's Church, could accommodate 1,300 dwellings, but due to its proximity to Bishop's Tachbrook village and plateau position would need substantial landscape buffering on its south side. Part of the site is Grade 2 farmland.



Fig. 8 View SW from Gallows Hill to The Asps site in the distance, with trees lining the Banbury Road

(iii) The Publication Draft (May 2014) retained the site south of Harbury Lane, now proposed for 1,500 dwellings, but dropped the proposed allocation South of Gallows Hill.

#### *Heritage policies and evidence base*

The heritage policies proposed in the emerging Local Plan largely carry forward in style and substance the policies in the 2007 Local Plan, adjusted to reflect the National Planning Policy Framework published in 2012. They continue to focus on particular types of heritage asset and to avoid comment on the strategic aspects of heritage in Warwick or any other town in



the district. There is a particular emphasis on protecting both significant unlisted buildings and historic parks and gardens (and their settings), as Warwick has 11 parks and gardens on the national list and 29 additionally on its local list.

The evidence base in support of heritage policies is of mixed value in helping to shape urban growth. There are various Urban Conservation Area Statements, including one for the Warwick Conservation Area (in separate parts), but these are brief and descriptive – not appraisals – without showing how the information might be used for planning purposes. It is not clear how, if at all, this information has informed development land allocations.

The County Council completed a *Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project* in 2010 (for English Heritage) with a very substantial new database suitable for informing development in the southern part of Warwick District. Historic landscape information has been put to use in the Publication Draft Local Plan at a number of important points:

- Policy CT7, on identifying its significance to Warwick Castle and Warwick Racecourse;
- Policy NE4 on landscape, on considering the historic character and landscape context of new development;
- In support of the housing policy allocations in Policy DS11, where proposed sites were considered against a Historic Setting Assessment; and
- In support of employment site allocations in Policy DS9, where a site north of Gallows Hill, Warwick is chosen in part specifically because of its suitability in relation to the setting of historic assets.

This is a substantial improvement on the Preferred Options report, which mentioned none of these points and made only a single passing reference to the County Council's report. It is also an improvement on the Revised Development Strategy, where historic environment is mentioned only (a) in deciding that there were no insurmountable constraints of this kind to preclude the Council's housing and employment land allocations south of Warwick (paragraph 5.1.33), and (b) to announce the withdrawal of The Asps proposed allocation site partly because this provides a historic context to the Castle Park (paragraph 4.3.8).

The proposed policies are therefore welcome but do not go as far as the County Council's report suggests: this mentions the adjacent Stratford-on-Avon DC Core Strategy of February 2010 which included Policy CS13. That more proactively required that "Development should have regard to the distinctiveness and historic character of the District's different landscapes. Development should protect and enhance landscape character and avoid detrimental effects on patterns and features which make a significant contribution to the character, history and setting of a settlement or area." This would have been a more tangible and specific policy to apply to competing housing locations south of Warwick.

The evidence base on heritage also includes a pair of detailed documents clearly prepared for the purpose of supporting the Publication Draft Local Plan. Both were written in early 2014 by the Council's senior Conservation Officer and address (as draft documents never finalised) *The setting of heritage assets – Gallows Hill* and *The setting of heritage assets – The Asps*. These are analytical documents which both conclude that the sites in question should not be developed for heritage reasons.

Finally, historic environment information has been incorporated in part into evidence commissioned by the District Council primarily on landscape assessment, directly addressing the impacts of proposed development sites south of Warwick. Various Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Planning reports were commissioned from Richard Morrish Associates between 2009 and 2014, considering potential individual sites that might be allocated in the emerging Local Plan. In 2009 this work recommended that the sites South of Gallows Hill and The Asps had a high relative value to the setting of Warwick and Leamington and should be safeguarded from development. This was in the stated context that “Warwick and Leamington Spa have highly-valued historic cores and Warwick Castle and the associated Castle Park have national heritage significance. Protecting the setting of these features must be considered a principal goal of future development planning in the locality. In addition, and particularly as the towns are important tourist destinations, the quality of approaches to the town should be considered in all development planning.” The site South of Harbury Lane was found to have a Medium-High value to setting.

The main site options were revisited in November 2012 (*Considerations for Sustainable Landscape Planning*), with a wider brief that included the design and master-planning steps which would need to be taken should it be necessary to allocate additional sites for development. The land South of Harbury Lane was found developable subject to the creation of a green buffer on its southern side. The assessment remained opposed to the release of The Asps site as this “is prominent in approaches to Warwick, is valuable in the setting of the town and provides the historic context for Castle Park.” However, this time most of the South of Gallows Hill site could be “visually contained and... have limited impacts on the wider landscape”: it could be developed subject to appropriate green infrastructure provision including a 40m+ woodland shelter belt along Banbury Road. Figure 9 shows the tree belt screening Castle Park west of Banbury Road at present (when not in leaf) and Figure 10 shows the challenge of screening Banbury Road on its Gallows Hill side with the Technology Park beyond. It is not clear why the heritage arguments applied to The Asps did not apply with at least as great significance to the South of Gallows Hill site.



Figs. 9 and 10 Tree screening beside Banbury Road: to the Castle Park and South of Gallows Hill site

### *Heritage in the housing site allocation process*

There is a general consensus that the District Council paid insufficient attention to heritage in the preparation of its Preferred Options consultation in 2012, and has been trying to remedy this since then. The importance of protecting the setting of key heritage assets –

Warwick, the Castle Park and the Banbury Road approach to the town – had all been made clear in a commissioned landscape study in 2009, and the *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* in 2009 had described the area’s overall suitability as “Not suitable due to impact on Warwick Castle Park and on open countryside in area of high landscape value” (three sites W10, W26 and W27). The County Council’s research on historic landscape characterisation was also largely overlooked. Councillors wanted the economic benefits from heritage but had not addressed how to sustain the asset base. There was no history within the Council’s own policies of taking a Warwick-wide approach to heritage.

English Heritage and local organisations challenged the proposed allocation of two key housing sites at The Asps and South of Gallows Hill, both of which intruded into the Banbury Road approach to Warwick, would harm the setting of Castle Park, and were in varying degrees visible from the heavily-visited towers of Warwick Castle. The Publication Draft of the Local Plan eventually withdrew these proposals, introduced improved heritage setting policies, and belatedly commissioned heritage reports on the sites, but the original allocations have left an awkward legacy. Developers have proposed housing on both sites, and the Council is now opposing developments it previously recommended. This will not be helped South of Gallows Hill by the Council having commissioned in 2012 a report to examine precisely how the site could indeed be developed. Nor will the 2012 *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* reflect well on the Council as this amended the overall suitability of all three sites for development in line with the Preferred Options version of the Local Plan to state “Potentially suitable subject to mitigation of impact on Warwick Castle Park and on open countryside in area of high landscape value”. The 2014 SHLAA reverted to the 2009 approach, now referring to the unsuitability of all three sites based on the 2014 study on *The Setting of Heritage Assets*. Public inquiries have been heard into both schemes and the decisions are awaited.

#### *The impact of development on Warwick town centre*

The Publication Draft Local Plan proposes 3,245 dwellings on the edges of Warwick, Leamington and Whitnash 2011-29 (with a request in Proposed Modifications to reduce this to just below 3,000). This is a substantial reduction from the 4,550 proposed a year earlier in the Revised Development Strategy, largely due to the grant of significant planning permissions in the interim and some reallocations to Kenilworth and brownfield sites. The proportions and numbers of extra people who will wish to enter Warwick town centre (rather than Leamington in particular) are unclear, but there is no doubt that a substantial extra number will wish to do so if the proposed dwellings are built. Numbers are also likely to rise from urban land recycling.

The Transport section of the emerging Local Plan commits itself to applying legislation and Government policy in a variety of ways, and is keen to remind developers of obligations that will be imposed on the layout of their developments for purposes of sustainable transport. However, it is remarkably thin on actions which the Council itself will take or integration between planning policy and the County Council’s transport policy (as Highways Authority). There are no proposals to curtail car parking in Warwick, prioritise walking or cycling, or take worthwhile actions to constrain traffic. No distinction is made between through-traffic and destination traffic, or steps proposed for limiting the former.



Given the baseline level of traffic congestion from existing development, the availability of only one bridge over the River Avon within Warwick, and the difficulty of introducing significant capacity improvements by means likely to be acceptable (whether in heritage, environmental, social or economic terms), the options for resolving pressures for additional travel are limited. There are no simple solutions. The Sustainability Appraisal on the Publication Draft Local Plan is clear that “Transport assessments indicate that provision of new housing and employment will result in increased levels of traffic with increased journey times and slower vehicle speeds. Without appropriate mitigation there is clearly the potential for these policies to have major long-term negative effects on the existing transport network” (paragraph 5.32). In practice the emerging Local Plan is underpinned by the ‘STA’ – Warwickshire County Council’s *Strategic Transport Assessment Phase 4 – Revised Development Allocation Testing* (March 2014) and associated reports. This concluded that further refinement of the proposed mitigation measures along with more detailed work on measures which may reduce the car based trip generation through alternative sustainable modes would likely reduce the identified impacts of proposed development.

Studying the transport documentation associated with the future of Warwick has been beyond the capacity of this review, but initial indications suggest that the STA does not provide grounds for confidence. The ‘proposed mitigation measures’ involve numerous modest proposals for enabling the road network to perform better (priced at £34m), not reducing the scale of demand, and will fall short of what is needed to avoid congestion becoming worse. ‘More detailed work which may reduce trip generation’ is conjectural in its efficacy. A review of the STA by Royal Haskoning DHV for a consortium of local organisations (*WCC STA4 Peer Review*, May 2014) found it made remarkably optimistic assumptions about modal shift, the spreading of peak travel times by institutions changing their working hours, and excluding education trips from peak flows. All of these are unsupported by evidence. The likelihood appears to be that even optimistic assumptions for reduced car trips, better managed travel, and capacity improvements will be insufficient to avoid worsening vehicular congestion in Warwick town centre. The STA does not address the consequences of either additional vehicles or additional congestion on heritage.

Warwick District Council argues that the concentration of housing development south of the town will increase the likelihood of journeys to Coventry and similar destinations being made outside Warwick altogether via the M40 and A46 rather than through the town centre. This could be a helpful contribution to offsetting problems provided those roads have capacity and that the peripheral route can be insisted-upon. Ensuring that additional traffic which might pass through the town centre is encouraged or obliged to seek an alternative route (or mode or avoid the need to travel at all) merits more serious consideration. The ‘Warwick Registration Match Survey’ which tracked vehicles entering and leaving an outer cordon around Warwick and/or an inner cordon (i.e. the town centre) found that in the morning peak hour:

- 9% of vehicles began their journeys outside Warwick, passed through both the outer and inner cordons and then left Warwick completely (i.e. wholly through traffic); and
- 17% of vehicles began their journeys in the outer cordon, passed through the town centre and left the outer cordon (or travelled in reverse to finish in the outer area).

These two categories of vehicle are travelling through Warwick town centre for convenience rather than because they 'have to', and are prime candidates for diversion of their routes. Furthermore:

- 9% of all journeys finished in the town centre: these are candidates for modal shift;
- 6% of all journeys began and finished in the outer cordon but passed through the inner cordon: a proportion of these is likely to be drop-off journeys for education followed by return-to-start, which are candidates for modal shift; and
- 3% of all journeys began in the town centre and finished within the outer cordon (and a further 3% finished beyond the outer cordon): these too are candidates for modal shift.

In all, therefore, 47% of all morning peak hour vehicle movements in Warwick pass through the town centre. Not all are readily avoidable, but there is a prospect of incentivising or requiring alternative arrangements tailored to people's travel objectives.

Planning for development and traffic in Warwick begins from the point of view of the needs of the additional people proposed to be housed. If it began from the point of view of the heritage of the town centre then other approaches would be worthy of consideration, such as the following (with appropriate exemptions for town centre residents):

- closing Castle Bridge to all traffic other than cycles, buses and public service vehicles;
- large-scale pedestrianisation of the town centre;
- vehicular access controlled to specific times of day;
- much-reduced town centre parking for non-residents, and workplace parking levies;
- step-change improvements in cycling facilities and bus services;
- park-and-ride, with additional bus services run by schools and other destinations.

A study commissioned by Warwickshire County Council from Atkins<sup>2</sup> does begin to address modal shift from car to cycling, walking and buses (and these also improve journey times), though it does not consider radical options. A positive response to this advice by Warwick DC would be a step in the right direction. These kinds of measures understandably raise



questions about the impact on town centre businesses, and some changes would be inevitable. It would, however, be wrong to assume that changes would necessarily be for the worse: a more pedestrian, car-constrained town centre would make Warwick a much more attractive and marketable place to visit and linger. Music and pavement cafes on the High Street (Figure 11) perhaps?

Fig. 11 Warwick High Street

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<sup>2</sup> *Warwick and Leamington Spa Transport Strategy: Review of Sustainable Transport Alternatives*, January 2015

## Lessons learnt

Individual historic buildings and other heritage assets have generally been well-preserved by Warwick District Council over the years. However, planning has focused on the trees rather than the wood. For decades a very substantial scale of traffic has been allowed to pass through Warwick town centre, despite this being a top-rated historic town with a mediaeval street layout. This stresses the buildings, the air quality, enjoyment of the heritage environment and personal appreciation of the town centre. Initiatives so far have not responded effectively to the root cause of the problem. The rate of housing development on the periphery of Warwick has begun to grow again after a slow-down following the 2007 Local Plan, threatening the heritage both directly (appreciation of the Georgian planned entrance to the town and visually challenging the town's setting) and indirectly (through rising traffic volumes in the centre which are forecast to become discernibly worse). The response of the District and County Councils to this has been both delayed and inadequate.

In planning terms, heritage is not greatly appreciated or prioritised outside the small Conservation team, while councillors' priorities are currently for economic growth and development. However, there is now better appreciation by senior officers and councillors of the effects of peripheral expansion on Warwick's heritage at the urban scale than only three years ago. All parties do appreciate and wish to retain the huge economic boost delivered by Warwick Castle and the inherent attractions of historic Warwick as a retail centre; the town remains attractive for growth because it is still a fine and distinctive historic place in which to live. The problem seems to be that heritage has not been conceptualised as an issue at the whole town scale, nor sufficient attention given to articulating the features which shape its special heritage qualities. Even the heritage policies of the Local Plan neglect this. The critical importance of understanding the heritage significance of a whole town is an underlying lesson from Warwick.

Warwick District Council as a whole simply did not realise it was making a bad mistake when in 2012 it proposed to allocate a substantial area of land on the southern periphery of Warwick for extended urban development. The information and advice not to make the allocation was available to it at the time, but this was not sufficiently appreciated. The very small conservation team did not have the influence in the Council to avoid the problem. Nor was the Council alert to the warning signals: substantial local opposition and particularly the intervention of English Heritage did make for a realisation that a problem existed, but the response was slow and misplaced. A revised draft Local Plan in 2013 still allocated an historically important part of Warwick's landscape for development, in this case caused largely by asking the wrong question of a consultant – on how (rather than whether) the land should be developed (and preferring the answer given over other advice). Only when the Publication Draft of the Local Plan was issued a year later was the problem rectified. Only then in 2014, nearly two years after a popular storm arose over the allocations, did the Council commission the evidence to support a more sympathetic heritage response to the issues. That there can be so startling a lack of heritage awareness in so important an historic town is troubling. There are no easy solutions: recommending more influence for Conservation will not change the mindset which ensures the limited nature of that influence in the first place. The response should lie in top-down heritage training for councillors and senior council officials and in more specific national guidance from both Historic England



and from the DCLG. Authorities do respond to guidance, not least as indicated by Warwick DC's work on settings: the Council's two reports on *The setting of heritage assets* in 2014 closely followed English Heritage's model format on this topic.

On the wider issue of sustainable growth around historic towns, Warwick illustrates real difficulties between the competing strands of sustainability. Due to the location of administrative boundaries, Warwick DC is under pressure to take housing growth generated by Coventry and is willing to do so (perhaps unduly willing in view of the heritage constraints). Provision for Coventry's needs would ideally be made close to Coventry, but this is prevented by the West Midlands Green Belt, a constraint so strong that avoiding urban sprawl is outweighing other reasonable interests. The result has been to redirect Warwick DC's housing growth to the south side of Warwick and Leamington beyond the Green Belt, on the opposite side of those towns from Coventry. This is a sensitive area around Warwick in heritage terms. This is likely to make worse the traffic problems and heritage impacts in those towns, and Warwick DC's efforts to develop more suitable sites in these terms have met little success. The lesson here is that the preservation of Warwick town centre and of its historic setting would both be supported by judicious amendments to the Green Belt boundaries on the north side of Warwick and Leamington Spa, thereby allowing housing development closer to Coventry. Also, the choice of housing sites available on the south side of Warwick have turned out to be much more constrained than the Council expected, so the main site now allocated includes some high grade (Grade 2) agricultural land.

Through traffic and historic town centres do not mix happily, as Warwick amply demonstrates. In Warwick's case the road network which funnels traffic into the mediaeval streets is little changed since 1793. An already very high level of traffic and congestion will become worse unless serious action is taken, especially if the housing and other developments on the south side of the town are confirmed in the Local Plan. The emphasis will need to move away from trying to accommodate extra vehicles through capacity improvements. The evidence supporting the Local Plan demonstrates that capacity improvements will not work, but still the proposed mitigations are very tentative. The choices are to live with the worsening problem or to pursue more profound solutions which involve changes to the way people travel – and in some cases lifestyle changes. The Council should take firm action so that fewer people rely on their cars for principal journeys. Some historic towns have realised that historic trends cannot continue (the congestion is simply too great) and that 'sustainable transport' must become a meaningful action rather than a phrase in a plan. Warwick may well be able to learn from towns which have already taken action.

The approach to heritage and growth which Warwick is taking at present, (just avoiding direct impacts on its main heritage assets as a town, and preparing to endure worsening traffic impacts on the heritage in its town centre), is only a sticking plaster response to its underlying problems. The lesson is that for even the medium term the town and the authority should think more boldly about how they propose to address the scale of urban development, its location in relation to the Green Belt, and what serious action they consider appropriate to control vehicular journeys (especially by car). All are matters which will become more pressing and they will not become easier to resolve.

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