



SOLIHULL CONNECTED 2023 - REPORT OF CONSULTATION

This document sets out the finding and results from the 2023 consultation into the draft Solihull Connected Transport Strategy along with a summary of the methodology. During the consultation we engaged with Councillors, the public, and Stakeholders. The results of this engagement follow.

Solihull Connected Report of Consultation

March 2023 – Completed report

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1. INTRODUCTION

Conducting widespread and meaningful public consultation was a crucial element in the development of the original Solihull Connected transport strategy. It has played an equally important role in the 2023 update, ensuring appropriate understanding and buy-in from Solihull residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

The Council's current transport strategy, Solihull Connected, was adopted in 2016. Although it may seem like the strategy was adopted relatively recently, much has changed in the last six years. The way in which people travel, and the reasons for travelling, are likely to have shifted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, an increasing focus is being placed upon accelerating uptake of public transport and active travel modes (particularly for short, frequent journeys) due to various environmental, economic, and societal factors. The principles, objectives and structure of the adopted strategy remain valid within the context of recently issued advice and guidance; however, a 'refresh' is required to ensure that appropriate emphasis is given to such modes of travel within the document.

This Report of Consultation sets out the details of the findings and results of the consultation phase including a summary of the methodology deployed.

2. CONSULTATION TIMETABLE AND METHODS

The Solihull Connected 2023 consultation ran for six weeks from Monday 9th January to Monday 20th February 2023. All responses had to be received by 5pm on Monday 20th February 2023.

The table below sets out the different consultation methods used, to consult with as many people as possible so that the new Transport Strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of our diverse community. The Council considers wide engagement to be important and therefore several different methods were deployed.

Method of Consultation	Consultees	Dates	Comments
Display Solihull Connected and accompanying documents on the Council's website.	All	From 9 th January 2023	A dedicated website was developed, and continually updated. The new Transport Strategy was available on the website from 9 th January 2023.
Mail out to all the statutory prescribed bodies and consultees.	All statutory consultees / prescribed bodies and neighbouring Councils.	Week commencing 9 th January 2023	This includes all relevant statutory consultees, all the prescribed bodies as set out in the Localism Act, as well as all of our neighbouring councils.
Display the Transport Strategy and its supporting	All	Week commencing 9 th January 2023	The Transport Strategy was available to view at all our libraries and two Solihull Connect centres.

documents at libraries and Solihull Connect centres			
Place a press notice in the local newspaper to advertise the start of the consultation period	All	Week commencing 2 nd January 2023	Notice placed in the Solihull Observer.
Leaflets	All	Week commencing 9 th January 2023	'Area Strategy' leaflets were produced for communicating all consultation stages and were used as part of consultation events.
E- Bulletins via 'Stay Connected' service	All	Week commencing 9 th January 2023	This is a free service the Council provides that enables users to register and receive alerts regarding the service preferences they wish to make.
Adverts and notices in public places	All	Week commencing 9 th January 2023	Used for communicating all consultation stages and particularly useful for site/area specific documents to notify those who use the area.
Press releases	All	Week commencing 9 th January 2023	Appropriate for advertising all consultation and attracting the attention of those not generally involved in planning matters.

3. SOLIHULL MBC COUNCILLORS

Three Solihull MBC Councillor drop-in sessions were held in December 2022, intent of which was to provide information and further raise awareness of the content of the Draft Strategy and Delivery Plan, and accompanying documentation, prior to the commencement of public consultation. Each drop-in session was tailored to reflect the needs and varying demographics of distinct parts of the borough:

- Tuesday December 13th – Solihull Civic Centre, 3:30pm to 5:30pm. North Solihull & UK Central Hub
- Wednesday December 14th – Solihull Civic Centre, 3:30pm to 5:30pm. Rural East & Southern Fringe.
- Thursday December 15th – Solihull Civic Centre, 3:30pm to 5:30pm. Solihull Town Centre & Urban Core.

In addition, individual meetings were subsequently held with Councillors during the consultation period.

4. PUBLIC

Public consultation ran from **Monday 9th January 2023** to **Monday 20th February 2023** – a period of six weeks.

The Council’s online platform, ‘Your Voice Solihull’, was used as the principal channel of communication for conducting the consultation, supplemented by promotion via the Council’s social media channels. A dedicated website was created within the system, upon which the Draft Strategy and Delivery Plan were published, alongside various evidence base reports. Feedback was predominantly captured through completion of an online survey, with an additional facility made available to enable the submission of questions / feedback directly.

In total, the website attracted a total of 1,900 visits, with the highest number of visits per day being 263. 71 of these visits were classified as being ‘engaged visits’ (people that have filled in the survey or submitted a question), 845 of the visits were ‘informed visits’ (people that have downloaded the consultation material) and 1,333 of the visits were classed as being ‘aware visits’ (people who have visited the website).

In addition to the consultation material being available online, Officers hosted five public drop-in sessions to enable direct face-to-face engagement with those living and working in different parts of the borough, as summarised below:

AREA	VENUE	DATES	TIMES	VISITOR NUMBERS
North Solihull	Chelmsley Wood library	16 th January 2023	9:30am – 1pm	9
Southern Fringe	Knowle library	19 th January 2023	9:30am – 1pm	14
Solihull town centre	The Core library	27 th January 2023	11am – 3pm	15
Rural East	Balsall Common library	30 th January 2023	2pm – 5pm	15
Urban Core	Olton library	14 th February 2023	9:30am – 1pm	17



Photo1: Consultation event at The Core, Solihull

Section 6 provides a categorised summary of feedback received during the consultation, key highlights of which include:

- Access to health care such as hospitals can be difficult especially for people in the rural east of the borough, where appointments may involve travelling to University Hospital Coventry, which is in Walsgrave on the eastern side of Coventry.
- There are concerns across the borough about speeding traffic, the quantum of traffic and the lack of enforcement of both speed restrictions and other traffic regulations in particular parking restrictions.
- Many roads in the south and east of the borough have limited footways, if any.
- The West Midlands Bus on Demand is now a real part of the transport mix in the east of the borough, but there are concerns about service availability, cost, and access. These are, in part, already being addressed by Transport for West Midlands.
- The availability of electric vehicle charging points. There is support for more charging points.
- There was support for growing the network of cycle routes across the borough and an understanding of the reasons why Solihull MBC and other authorities are promoting cycling.
- There were mixed views regarding the existing cycle routes in the borough and the proposals for Gate Lane, near Dorridge.
- There was support for improvements to canal towpaths in the borough to bring them up to the same quality as towpaths in Birmingham, Coventry and elsewhere in the conurbation.
- There needs to be additional safe parking for cycles, especially new generation electric bikes.
- There was support for improving car parking at railway stations, with Olton Station being specifically referenced.

5. STAKEHOLDERS

Statutory consultees, relevant public bodies, neighbouring Councils and stakeholders were contacted at the beginning of the consultation period in early January 2023, including those identified below:

Academies, Colleges, and Schools	Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership
Age UK (Solihull)	Guide Dogs for the Blind
Birmingham Airport	Jaguar Land Rover
Bus and rail passenger groups	Motorcycle Action Group
Bus operating companies	National Exhibition Centre
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England	Neighbouring Borough, City, County and District Councils
Canal & River Trust	Network Rail and train operators
Chamber of Commerce	Parish Councils
Emergency Services	Pushbikes and Sustrans
Federation of Small Businesses	The two members of Parliament for the area
Friends of the Earth	Transport for West Midlands

Representatives from several of the stakeholder groups attended public consultation events, whilst meetings were held with Knowle, Dorridge & Bentley Heath Bus Action Group (January 10), the North Solihull Business Forum (January 17), Meriden Parish Council (also January 17) and the Motorcycle Action Group (February 2).

Consultation responses were received from the following organisations:

Arden Cross Limited & Muse Developments wrote in support of the objectives and principles of the draft Transport Strategy, recognising and supporting the ambition around decarbonisation of transport and focus on public transport and active travel. They also welcomed the focus on schemes and policies to enable sustainable development at the UK Central Hub including Arden Cross.

Balsall Parish Council provided a detailed response on the draft Transport Strategy. Whilst the Parish Council was generally supportive of the principles, it considered there to be several errors and omissions, as well as issues that it felt were not sufficiently addressed. The Parish Council considers that all Solihull MBC strategies should have proper strategic concern for the Balsall Common area and provide the infrastructure and public transport to meet local needs, current and future. The Parish Council therefore considers the draft strategy to be insufficiently strategic in its consideration to Balsall Common and environs.

Birmingham Airport welcomed the development of the draft strategy and its aim to meet the strategic transport needs of the Borough with its focus on reducing carbon emissions arising from surface access to the Airport, improving access through longer public transport operating hours at times when there are currently limited transport options and minimising the impact that disruption on the network has on journeys to the Airport.

Birmingham City Council provided a response which offers a breakdown on the shape of the draft Transport Strategy along with detailed comments and suggestions for improving the draft strategy further, to tie into national policy and to complement their own Transport Plan.

A generally supportive response was received from the **Canal & River Trust**, which naturally proposes that improving the towpaths within the Borough could contribute to a modal shift towards walking and cycling. Other improvements to encourage use of the towpaths for sustainable travel include creating new accessible towpath access points at strategic locations, such as near to transport interchanges and employment areas. Improved wayfinding can also be highly beneficial, making residents aware of the canal network and the places that can be reached by using it.

Cycle Solihull put in a submission that states that whilst the group is keen to support the strategy and in principle any schemes to grow numbers of cycling, it remains sceptical about the commitment to deliver real change in terms of levels of cycling in Solihull. Cycle Solihull express frustration with the lack of progress with previous commitments to grow the numbers of cyclists and a lack of evidence in the strategy that the measures proposed will lead to change.

Enterprise Holdings submitted a response lobbying for the inclusion of car clubs and expressing the benefits of including car clubs in the strategy and how these would contribute to our aims.

Jaguar Land Rover submitted a letter that outlined three needs of their business from the transport network. They find the draft strategy will contribute to these three needs and expressed a desire to work with Solihull MBC to deliver these needs.

The **Knowle, Dorridge & Bentley Heath Bus Action Group** response supports the Council's aim for our transport system to make it easier for residents to travel around the borough, offer a choice of travel modes to allow us to reach net zero carbon and will make our communities great places to live.

However, the Bus Action Group also offers several comments on the current bus network and how this can be developed further and note that frequent public transport is really needed to reduce car dependency.

The **Motorcycle Action Group** stressed that motorcycling needed to be embedded in all parts of any transport strategy to achieve the vision of a multi-modal transport system. The Group feels that motorcycling has many benefits to offer to help achieve increased mobility, social inclusion, reduced congestion, improved air quality, accelerated decarbonisation, and economic growth. The Group asks for a transport plan that recognises the benefits and fully integrates the mode into the long-term planning for Solihull Borough.

The **National Exhibition Centre** welcomed the publication of the new strategy and the vision and objectives for a multi-modal transport system that benefits the Borough's communities and businesses, and the visitors to the area. The NEC has provided a wide number of comments and additional information to help inform amendments to the draft strategy and delivery plan, as summarised in Section 6.

Natural England responded but felt that they were unable to fully assess the potential impacts of the strategy. However, they offered useful advice covering areas such as landscape, protected species, ancient woodland, rights of way, access & recreation along with biodiversity, all of which will be pertinent when developing and delivering schemes set out in the Solihull Connected 2023 Delivery Plan.

The response from **Resorts World** noted that the Borough is embarking on potentially the most transformative and exciting period for change it has ever faced, driven by the economic developments and opportunities that HS2 will bring. Therefore, it is right for the Council to refresh its Transport Plan encompassing the challenges and opportunities this will mean to the mobility of residents and visitors around the Borough and to plan for that in the most up to date and sustainable ways possible.

Transport for West Midlands' submission welcomed and recognised the positive ambition for improving transport within Solihull outlined within the draft strategy, which in their words, outlines a bold intent for an improved transport system. Their response is shaped, to an extent around the emerging West Midlands Local Transport Plan 5 'Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands'. The Core Strategy approved by WMCA Board in February will now set the tone for the development of transport policy and strategy in region. The TfWM submission offered a number of detailed areas where the draft Solihull Transport Strategy could be improved to further support TfWM's regional role and indicate how the two authorities will work together. Many of TfWM's recommendations appear in the post consultation version of the strategy.

The **Urban Growth Company** also submitted a helpful response focused particularly on the areas of concern to them and offering support and further suggestions where needed. The response highlights the importance of ensuring that all guidance documents and strategies work cohesively so partners in development are delivering the necessary infrastructure to the relevant standards for existing and new communities.

In its response, **Warwickshire County Council** notes that the vision, aims and objectives of the Strategy closely mirror those of the County Council's recent Local Transport Plan review, with a focus on helping

to address climate change through decarbonisation of the transport system, whilst at the same time supporting sustainable economic and housing growth. The need to improve access to UK Central is strongly supported by Warwickshire County Council, particularly in terms of ensuring the new HS2 Interchange is well-connected when it opens.

6. STRATEGY COMPLETION

The public consultation on the draft Solihull Connected 2023 Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan has generated a significant number of responses from the public and indicates widespread interest in the future of transport and travel in the borough.

Feedback from the consultation has been analysed, and the Solihull Connected 2023 Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan amended accordingly. The table below summarises responses received, and highlights where changes have been made to the documents:

Consultation feedback	Amendment made
Correction needed to number of parking spaces proposed for HS2 Interchange station	Amended.
Reference to catchment area for HS2 Interchange station underplays significance of scope	Amended reference.
Reference to numbers of passengers using Birmingham Airport needs amending to reflect Airport's business plan and considering growing evidence that air travel recovery continues	Amended following feedback from Birmingham Airport.
Insert reference to future role of UKC Hub	Inserted following suggestion from UGC.
Vision & Objectives – many people and stakeholders suggested inserting reference to environmental impacts	Reference now added.
Objective 1 – added text regarding diversity of modes to outcomes. Many people thought we were being too narrow in our focus. Others considered that certain factors were missing.	Outcomes text amended.
Why do we need a transport strategy – reason two. Although there are challenges there are also opportunities.	Agreed. Text change made.
Page 20 – housing numbers for UKC Hub and Balsall Common incorrect	Corrected.
Page 21 – reference to housing numbers for Knowle should be added	Agreed. Text change made.
Policy1 – number of references to bus services made throughout the consultation. Many passed to TfWM for consideration and others surrounding service delivery and quality noted. Other comments made for future network development.	Changes made to note need to grow bus ridership numbers to make network sustainable. References also added to the Bus Services Improvement Plan and the Enhanced Partnership and possible extension of Sprint to HS2 Interchange.
Policy2 – similar comments raised around service delivery and rail service timetables.	Reference to opportunity of HS2 added.

Policy3 – need for safe cycling and walking routes, motorcycle parking at local centres and potential new centre at Arden Cross identified	All added to policy text.
Add motorcycle parking to definition of Mobility Hubs	Additional text added to description.
Reference to Amazon lockers should be changed to generic parcel lockers	Noted. Text changed.
Policy4 – reference to cycling for everyone needed to be expanded. Several replies note this but with no consensus on best alternative.	Text changed and wording expanded.
Policy4 – no references in the draft strategy to either the West Midlands LCWIP or the Starley network	Text changed and references added following feedback from TfWM
Policy4 – no reference to canal network or Kenilworth Greenway. Picked up by several correspondents.	Text changed and references added
Large numbers of comments relating to cycling received. Many negative.	Several amendments and additional points added to cover debate further and support other initiatives such as West Midlands Cycle Hire scheme.
Policy5 – no reference to West Midlands Key Route Network	Text changed accordingly
Policy6 – a lot of comments received from public and stakeholders about access to UKC Hub and several updates and additional information provided surrounding the proposals	Text changed accordingly with additional information and breakdown of proposals where needed.
Policy6 – the UGC is working on an SPD for the UKC Hub area	Reference added to draft strategy document
Policy7 – concerns raised about how successful funding of section106 and real concerns amongst public of how the Council will access funding to allow proposals to be developed	Text amended based on feedback
Policy8 – no reference to West Midlands Key Route Network	Text changed accordingly
Policy8 – Birmingham Airport also raised concerns in this area connected to peak time for arrivals at the airport	Text changed accordingly
Policy9 – Motorcycle Action Group suggested need for charging points for electric motorcycles	Text amended based on suggestion from Motorcycle Action Group
Policy10 – Several respondents identified need for safe and secure cycle parking at locations across the borough	Reference added to draft strategy document
Policy11 – Motorcycle Action Group identified use of powered two wheelers for short distance deliveries and need to manage this.	Text added to reflect this concern
Policy12 – Number of responses regarding autonomous vehicles	Additional text added regarding vulnerable user groups
Area strategies – number of members of public questioned validity of consultation and involvement of local people in planning decisions affecting their local areas.	Additional text added to recognise this concern to page 51

UKC Hub – number of responses regarding provision of Metro to the hub and the development of connections between HS2 Interchange and neighbouring facilities	Additional text added into this part of the Strategy document based on the responses and additional information received
North Solihull – concerns raised by public about access to both Chelmonds Cross and services in the east of Birmingham. Feeling also from Birmingham City Council that we had missed links from the east of Birmingham to north of Solihull	Both points added to the area strategy
Rural East – several people concerned by description of Balsall Common as a “small” village	Deleted
Rural East – several people felt we overplayed the significance of the railway station at Berkswell	Reference amended accordingly
Rural East – number of complaints about current cycle and bus service provision in this area and the need for improvement	Area strategy amended accordingly