

TECHNICAL NOTE

Stratford-upon-Avon Highway Capacity Study

SUBJECT

Non-Technical Summary

PROJECT NO.

100120224

DATE

19 December 2025

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Warwickshire County Council**DOCUMENT REFERENCE**

Draft

ICEPAC NO.**ATKINSRÉALIS NO.**

Document history

Revision	Purpose description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
1.0	Initial Exec Summary for Review	AL	EG	LS	RD	19/12/25

Client signoff

Client	Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Warwickshire County Council		
Project	Stratford-upon-Avon Highway Capacity Study	Project No.	100120224

Client
signature /
date

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Study Overview

AtkinsRéalis has been appointed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC), on behalf of Stratford-upon-Avon District Council (SDC), to undertake a study examining the potential for a longer-term highway solution for Stratford-upon-Avon including initial consideration of the complementary transport opportunities. This work is being carried out in the context of the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP), currently being developed by Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick District Councils. The study will culminate in an Option Assessment Report (OAR), prepared in line with national guidance (TAG) from the Department for Transport. **This document provides a high-level non-technical summary of the study. The OAR provides more detailed evidence and is due to be finalised following stakeholder engagement in early 2026.**

Key Challenges

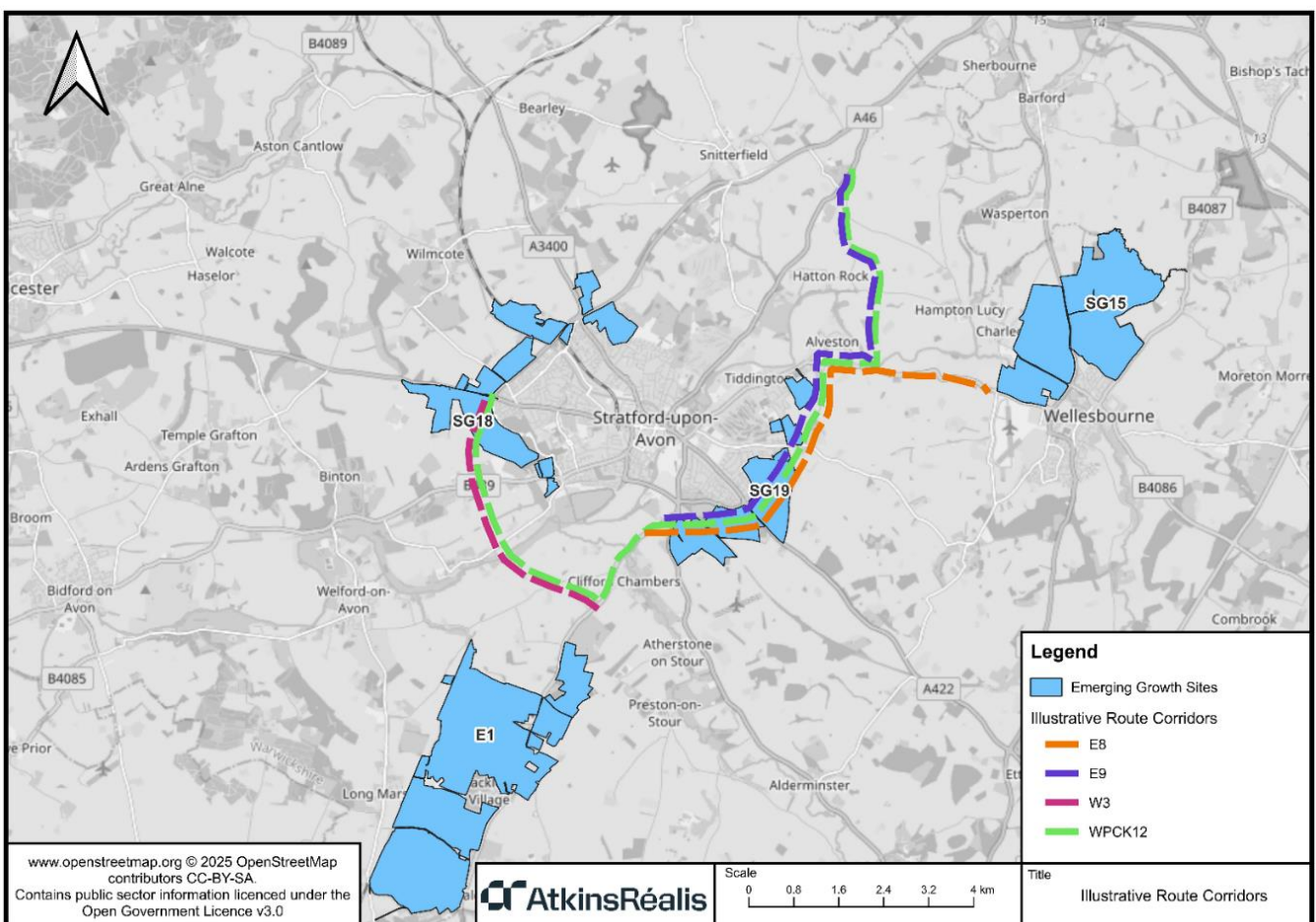
The key transport-related challenges within Stratford-upon-Avon in the context of the emerging SWLP include:

- **Rural district dominated by car ownership** - Levels of car ownership across the district are significantly higher than the national average - [89% of households in Stratford-upon-Avon own 1 or more cars or vansⁱ](#). This brings challenges around car parking and congestion in and around Stratford-upon-Avon town centre, and some health concerns from poor air quality. It also makes it difficult to encourage the use of public transport amongst residents.
- **Thriving tourism industry** - Stratford-upon-Avon is home to the world's most important Shakespeare heritage sites, including his birthplace. [Approximately six million people visit the district each year \(2.5 million of whom travel to the town of Stratford-upon-Avon\)](#), spending around £300m per year and supporting over 7,000 jobsⁱⁱ. Tourism is critical to the local economy, and supporting and enhancing tourist numbers is an important part of the district's transport strategy. Stratford-upon-Avon has a unique built environment with a historic town centre and many listed buildings, including the Grade I listed Shakespeare's birthplace and Clopton Bridge (also a Scheduled Ancient Monument). [The historic nature of the town means that the road layout is constrained, and congestion is a common issue, particularly during the holiday periods, when tourist numbers are at their highest.](#)
- **Lack of network resilience** – [Access between north and south Stratford relies on two bridge crossings across the River Avon.](#) Clopton Bridge and Severn Meadows Road bridge crossing are used by approximately 23,000 vehicles and 16,000 vehicles a day respectively, with 1% of vehicles classified as Heavy Goods Vehiclesⁱⁱⁱ. The local area is familiar with the disruption that can be caused by an unplanned closure of a key bridge crossing. In 2024, Bidford Bridge, a 15th Century bridge in nearby Bidford-on-Avon, was closed for a lengthy period due to damage caused by a collision. This caused major disruption to Bidford and the local area. If a similar incident happened at Clopton Bridge, Stratford-upon-Avon would be severely impacted.
- **Trips to Stratford-upon-Avon versus longer distance movements** – Congestion issues are caused by a combination of longer distance journeys through the town and journeys made into the heart of the town itself. For trips south of the River Avon, both types of movement are dependent on the Clopton Bridge and Seven Meadows Road. In order to be effective, highway solutions therefore need to consider how both types of movement can be diverted away from these most congested parts of the network.
- **Growth requirements** – The emerging [SWLP establishes the need to deliver at least 41,975 dwellings over a 25-year plan period from 2025 – 2050](#), with flexibility to accommodate up to 54,450 dwellings^{iv}. Spatial **potential growth** strategy priority areas and strategic growth locations have been identified as part of the SWLP development. Key potential growth areas of significant size in proximity to Stratford-upon-Avon town centre include Long Marston Airfield (E1), West of Stratford-upon-Avon (SG18), Wellesbourne (SG15 and SG16) and East of Stratford-upon-Avon (SG19), however there will also be an impact from growth across the wider district.

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Improvement Corridors

Based on evidence of transport challenges, environmental constraints, and growth aspirations, 35 potential improvement corridors were identified around Stratford-upon-Avon, including options to the east, west, and south, as well as the previously identified South Western Relief Road from the 2016 Core Strategy^v. Of these, 17 were individual corridors and 18 were various combinations of the 17 individual corridors. Each was assessed qualitatively against eight criteria, informed by the principles of DfT's Early Assessment Sifting Tool, such as scale of impact, policy alignment, environmental effects, deliverability, and public acceptability, using a bespoke Multi-Criteria Assessment Framework. This process shortlisted four corridors (shown in the map below) for further assessment: two eastern (E8 and E9), one western (W3), and one combined eastern-western option (WPCK12).



Corridor Assessment

The further assessment involved more detailed environmental appraisal, a review of the potential structural requirements at the river crossing locations and with other constraints such as the existing highway network, as well as being modelled in the 'Stratford-upon-Avon Wide Area' (SuAWA) Paramics microsimulation model developed by SLR Consulting. The modelling, undertaken by SLR Consulting, includes growth assumptions reflecting the emerging SWLP^{vi} as well as some smaller scale highway improvements along the A46 and in the town centre. The table overleaf summarises the impact of the eastern and western corridors when considered individually.

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Corridor	W3 – Western Corridor	E9 – Eastern Corridor
What traffic uses the new corridor, and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long Marston (E1) is the growth site that benefits the most from the corridor, with the link carrying traffic to the M40 Longbridge and traffic heading to the west of Stratford preferring to use the new corridor instead of Clopton Bridge or Severn Meadows. Around half of the traffic departing from the site in the AM peak uses the new river crossing. By supporting both local and longer distance movements from E1, there is strong potential for the corridor to support higher levels of growth at Long Marston. The corridor also reduces rat-running through Welford-on-Avon, which is a noticeable problem with the growth in place and no corridor improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new river crossing diverts various longer-distance movements towards Longbridge away from Stratford town centre. This includes existing traffic from the town south of Clopton Bridge as well as movements from SG19. Long-distance traffic from Long Marston (E1) travelling through Stratford towards Longbridge would also divert to use the route. Traffic from Wellesbourne (including SG15) uses the southern section of the route to access town centre. This reduces a proportion of traffic using Tiddington Road and Stratford Road/Warwick Road. However traffic then still continues to use Clopton Bridge or Seven Meadows Bridge.
What traffic doesn't use the new corridor, and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The corridor does not support traffic originating from the east of Stratford-upon-Avon growth site (SG19) or existing traffic immediately south due to the close proximity of Clopton Bridge, which provides a shorter more convenient route into or through Stratford-upon-Avon. It also does little to support growth at Wellesbourne (SG15) as it does not provide a suitable alternative route for accessing Stratford-upon-Avon (only for traffic heading west of the town via the A46). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movements across Stratford north and south of the river (including new development at SG19) would still be reliant on Clopton Bridge and Seven Meadows Bridge. Traffic between Long Marston (E1) and Stratford would also continue to rely on the existing Clopton Bridge and Seven Meadows Bridge, with no suitable alternative available in the absence of a western crossing. Traffic travelling from Wellesbourne to Longbridge would predominantly continue to use the A429 as a more direct route.
What impact does the new corridor have on Clopton Bridge and the town centre?	<p>Without a link road, modelling predicts that traffic around Clopton Bridge will be become grid-locked in future, with traffic within the town centre effectively stuck during both the morning and evening peak hour periods. It therefore becomes difficult to establish the reduction in demand for traffic using Clopton Bridge achieved by either corridor as the modelling tool is unable to measure the full demand for traffic trying to use the bridge in this comparative situation.</p> <p>Both corridors are effective in diverting different movements away from the town centre to reduce congestion on the constrained network. They also provide resilience by offering an additional crossing point. However a significant proportion of Local Plan trips (circa 40% according to current traffic model analysis) are still expected travel to areas of Stratford north of the River Avon. Many of these journeys would still seek to travel via Clopton Bridge given its central location. A comprehensive sustainable transport strategy needs to be developed to complement a new relief road corridor that considers how car dependency for more local movements can be reduced.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The western corridor approximately halves the amount of traffic from Long Marston in the AM peak that would use Clopton Bridge and reduces traffic using Severn Meadows. However, movements to the eastern side of the town continue to route predominantly via Clopton Bridge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic from the southern side of the River Avon travelling north of Stratford will generally avoid Clopton Bridge and the town centre. However, all local movements to the northern side of the river remain reliant on Clopton Bridge and Seven Meadows Bridge.

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Corridor	W3 – Western Corridor	E9 – Eastern Corridor
What are the key environmental constraints?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental constraints are minimal, and the severity of the environmental impact is likely to be less than E9. There are no Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments or designated heritage assets within 300 metres of route. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current indicative corridor passes through a Scheduled Monument and is located within 1 kilometre of two other Scheduled Monuments. Further work could potentially reroute the corridor to avoid the Scheduled Monument. The corridor would also result in the fragmentation of four deciduous woodland priority habitats and there is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Snitterfield that could mean an SSSI assent is required from Natural England.
What are the key delivery challenges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the point of the river crossing, there are three key constraints – the River Avon, the Greenway and Luddington Road, all of which need to be crossed with a potentially complex bridge structure. The location of the connection with the A46 would need to be investigated further. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The environmental constraints pose a key risk to the delivery of the corridor improvement. Whilst the bridge structure is likely to be less complex than W3, the longer length of the corridor could pose higher risks associated with land ownership and utilities. The illustrative corridor is near to a National Grid Gas Line.
What could the corridor improvement cost^{vii}?	Based on a route length of around 4.5 kilometres and a three-span bridge across the River Avon, the indicative cost is £80 – £100 million. This indicative cost does not allow for a bridge that would support the reinstatement of the Honeybourne rail line. This, along with the connections to the existing road network, will be considered in the next phase of work.	Based on a route length of approximately 10 kilometres and a two-span bridge across the River Avon, the indicative cost is £130 – £170 million. The longer length of the corridor is the main reason for the higher cost than W3.

The modelling exercise also [assessed the feasibility of combining the Western Corridor \(W3\) and Eastern Corridor \(E9\)](#) to create a continuous route from the A46 to Warwick Road (WPCK12). These two corridors are complementary, diverting different types of journeys away from the town centre. However, delivering both corridors is likely to [cost in the region of £250 million](#), presenting a substantial delivery risk, particularly within the current funding environment. Furthermore, this study is at an early feasibility stage, with numerous unknowns and uncertainties surrounding the implementation of corridor improvements. Relying on the delivery of both corridors to support growth to 2050 further amplifies this risk, and therefore a longer-term (extending beyond the 2050 plan period) phased approach to delivery of the two corridors improvements may be more appropriate.

Through engagement with SDC, we understand that Long Marston (E1) is critical to the emerging growth strategy and has considerable potential to accommodate more than the 3,000 dwellings (currently assumed in traffic modelling undertaken by SLR Consulting) by 2050. [If the cost of investment needs to be rationalised and should SDC include more than 3,000 dwellings at Long Marston, then the western corridor \(W3\) is considered a higher priority than the eastern corridor \(E9\).](#) This is because the western corridor serves movements both into Stratford itself (particularly on the western side of the town) and to the north of the town by connecting into the A46 corridor. With an eastern corridor, trips from Long Marston to the town would continue to rely solely on the existing crossing points to access destinations within Stratford.

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Stakeholders

The project includes engagement with stakeholders to support the development of the evidence base and provide feedback on the corridor identification and assessment. The stakeholder group includes WCC Highway and Transport Planning Officers, National Highways (Area 9 Spatial Planning team), SWLP team, Homes England, Stratford-upon-Avon Town Transport Group and portfolio holders, elected members and town/parish councils. Engagement to date has involved sharing the emerging evidence base on the transport-related problems. Further stakeholder engagement will be scheduled for early 2026 to share findings and receive feedback on the OAR.

Next Steps

The conclusions of this study including the likely cost of delivering a corridor improvement scheme are needed to inform the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). Subject to agreement with WCC and SDC, AtkinsRéalis will undertake the following activities to support the on-going development of the IDP:

- **Finalise the Option Assessment Report** – the full technical document will be completed following engagement with the project stakeholder group in early 2026.
- **Review W3 cost estimates** – costs developed to date are based on Order of Magnitude Cost Estimates derived from the length of the route and an approximate cost per kilometre, with high levels of risk and optimism bias applied to reflect the early feasibility stage (in line with DfT guidance). The next stage of work will focus solely on W3 (identified as the priority to facilitate Long Marston development), considering the high-risk locations such as junctions and the bridge structure for the route, utilising desktop-based evidence to review and refine the cost.
- **Explore funding sources** – a Funding Strategy will be developed that explores the potential sources of funding to deliver a corridor improvement scheme.

SDC are continuing to develop the emerging growth strategy and understand impacts across the area (with SLR Consulting leading on the wider transport evidence base). It is recommended that any long-term highway capacity enhancements are implemented in conjunction with a comprehensive sustainable transport strategy to address more locally based trips. This approach will further strengthen network resilience and support the longer-term protection of historic assets such as Clopton Bridge. A further recommendation for the wider evidence base is to carefully consider the interaction between employment growth locations (not yet confirmed) with the identified housing growth areas, and how either of the corridor improvements could support movement between these different land uses in a way that avoids traffic needing to travel through the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon.

ⁱ Source: ONS Census, 2021

ⁱⁱ Source: Stratford-upon-Avon Area Transport Strategy, January 2017

ⁱⁱⁱ Data taken from 2nd to 8th September 2025 extracted from 'Drakewell02 Portal'

^{iv} The South Warwickshire Local Plan Emerging Spatial Growth Strategy As at the Preferred Options consultation (November 2024)

^v [Core Strategy | Stratford-on-Avon District Council](#)

^{vi} Dwelling numbers are: 3,140 at Long Marston Airfield (E1), 3,940 at Wellesbourne (SG15), 3,940 at East of Stratford-upon-Avon (SG19) and 900 to the West of Stratford-upon-Avon (SG18 S).

^{vii} Order of Magnitude Costs based on desktop research and evidence, with an assumed rate per kilometre for a single carriageway 50mph route. These costs do not include the smaller scale improvements to the A46 or town centre.