

Mickleton Parish Council (MPC) Response to South Warwickshire Local Plan February 2025

Introduction

The content of MPC's response has been consolidated from multiple sources:

- Original submissions from MPC for a previous round of consultation, provided by Clerk Elaine Fuoco-Lang and Councillor Andy O'Neill.
- Notes and questions from Councillors Kevin Fletcher, Geoff Mayling, Andy O'Neill, and Chris Cottam, following reading of the South Warwickshire Plan consultation and associated documents.
- Comments received from Matthew Britton, Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure at Cotswold District Council.

Collaboration has also been sought with the directly impacted Parish Councils of Clifford Chambers, Quinton and Long Marston. To date we have not received replies from these Parish Councils. More locally, MPC has been invited to share perspectives with the Mickleton Society, and has tried to inform Parishioners via Facebook, Websites, and local magazines. Replies are also awaited following requests for data and perspective made to Gloucester County Council (Highways) and to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

The South Warwickshire Plan itself is complex, comprehensive and somewhat technical, all of which makes it a long and challenging read. The comment summary below is distilled from the detailed information in the report and simplified so as not to lose the key points. Comments relate primarily to the proposal for the expansion of the current developments at Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield into a broader development that links the 2 sites and expands into surrounding agricultural land, which would increase the number of dwellings from the currently agreed 3,500, to 6,000, 10,000, or possibly even 25,000 if the Government's 'New Town' guidelines were to be adopted for this site.

N.B. 6,000 dwellings is considered the minimum number required to support a Secondary School and GP Surgery, with 10,000 dwellings being a more optimum number.

Summary of Comments

1. Road Traffic

The principal road through Mickleton is the B4632, connecting Stratford towards Evesham, Worcester, the M5, and more generally 'The Cotswolds'. This road was downgraded from an 'A Road' to a 'B Road' when the Stratford Bypass was built but continues to carry 'A Road' volumes of traffic. Much of the Main Road through Mickleton is within a conservation area, fronted by period and listed buildings which are susceptible to both air pollution and vibrational damage from excessive traffic.

Traffic volumes; already considered an issue in terms of environmental impact, public safety, and flow rates; have been compounded by the recent housing developments at

Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield. To date, only around 1,000 of the planned 3,500 dwellings across these two sites have been constructed but traffic volumes through Mickleton have already increased significantly. There has also been an increase in the number of large commercial vehicles serving local businesses at Meon Storage and Metal Recycling, and others.

Any further increase in traffic volumes on the B4632 will push the road beyond viable capacity. This is a risk even with a limited number of small-scale developments along the B4632 (Clifford Chambers, Quinton etc.), but becomes almost certain if the developments at Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield go beyond the current approved plan of 3,500.

Traffic data analysis provided with the Plan suggests, even at the most optimistic level, 35,000 external vehicle trips per day from the Meon Vale and Long Marson Airfield sites when the number of dwellings reaches 6,000. The data also suggests that somewhere in the region of 13% of these trips will use the B4632 through Mickleton to reach Evesham and the Cotswolds. Current data from our Mickleton Community Speed Camera shows an approximate traffic flow volume of 1,000 vehicles per day coming into the village from the Stratford direction.

Even in this most optimistic case, and with all the other traffic reduction / mitigation measures discussed in the plan documents coming to fruition, (which we believe is highly questionable – see later), this represents an increase in traffic volume of between 4 and 5 times the current level. Any increase in the number of dwellings beyond 6,000 simply compounds this problem.

2. Other Transport Considerations

The Plan and associated documents refer to several transport options and anticipated working / travel practices that will impact transport considerations.

a. Relief Road.

Building of the South Warwickshire Relief Road (SWRR) that might have provided some level of traffic mitigation to the Stratford area is noted as being extremely unlikely due to lack of funding.

b. Railway.

Reopening of the railway line between Stratford and Honeybourne, with a new station at Long Marston Airfield, would generally be welcomed, but is noted as being extremely unlikely due to lack of funding.

c. Working from Home.

The estimated planning assumption that 44% of people will work from home or be directly employed within the area of this new site has little evidence to support it and appears significantly out of line with current behaviour seen in similar circumstances.

d. Active Transport.

The estimations of people who will choose to use 'active' forms of travel do not correlate with observable low levels of usage on current cycle schemes.

3. New Settlement Review

Based on an initial 'Call for Sites' begun in 2021, a total of 12 sites have been considered across South Warwickshire as possible sites for a New Settlement Development. The land between Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield site is one of these, designated "E1" in the planning documentation.

The suitability of these sites from a transport perspective was assessed by Warwickshire County Council in October 2024. In their report, "South Warwickshire Local Plan Strategic Transport and Education Assessment of New Settlement Options", WCC gave the Long Marston Airfield site a red rating for transport – the worst of all the 12 sites assessed. It concluded that the site had "multiple challenges from a transport perspective" and did not recommend that it should be taken forward for development.

Despite this, and site E1 being rated as unsuitable or average against many other of the evaluation criteria, surprisingly E1 is one of four sites being recommended to go forward for further consideration.

The only criteria that unites the four chosen sites is that of 'Call for Coverage', which represents how much of the total land under consideration was originally proposed in the 'Call for Sites' activity. This criterion fundamentally speaks to the financial opportunity offered to the owners of the land, and takes no account of environmental, societal, or other economic concerns.

4. Other Areas of Concern

a. Agricultural Land.

While the land between Meon and Long Marston Airfield site is not classified as 'Green Belt, a significant portion is good agricultural land (category 3). This should be protected.

b. Sustainability in a Rural Location.

The Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield site is in a rural location. It is considered unrealistic to assume new employers will create significant local employment opportunities to accommodate thousands of new residents between Stratford and Mickleton. Practical considerations suggest new settlements of this scale should be located in proximity to more established industrial / commercial areas.

c. Social Infrastructure.

To date, only one school has been built at the Meon Vale site, Tudor Grange Primary. There is local shopping and leisure facilities at Meon Vale and a local doctors surgery and a dentist at Upper Quinton. It is unlikely that these facilities will upscale with the proposed number of new dwellings without significant investment in the social infrastructure. This is particularly true for secondary education.

d. Flooding.

One of the planning analysis reports (HELAA Part A) indicates that some of the proposed land intersects with Flood Zones 2.

e. Biodiversity.

While the Long Marston Airfield site is not currently listed as ‘Ancient Woodland’, ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’, or any similar designations, it is a significant area of natural countryside that sustains wildlife populations and maintains biodiversity. There is little detail in the Plan that indicates how such areas might be protected.

f. Water Attenuation.

There is anecdotal evidence that current residents at Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield have low water pressure.

g. Access to Affordable Housing

Mickleton Parish Council would like to understand what access to affordable housing will be available to neighbouring villages to the new development.

5. Relevant extracts from the South Warwickshire Local Plan, Strategic Transport and Education Assessment of New Settlement Options, Warwickshire County Council, October 2024

The following are extracts from this document relating to site E1, Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield, all of which demonstrate the unsuitability of the site as a potential new settlement.

“The location of this option means that it is likely to look towards Stratford-upon-Avon, Evesham, Wellesbourne, Warwick and Leamington Spa as its nearest key centres for employment, retail and leisure purposes.”

“The site is poorly related to the SRN.....There are no MRN designated routes in this area”.

“There is limited LRN in the area of the potential new settlement, the only route of any significance being the B4632”

“Site E1: Strategic Transport Assessment Summary

Active Travel	RED
Rail	RED
Bus	AMBER
Highway (Strategic)	RED
Highway (Local)	RED
Overall Assessment	RED”

“The results of the assessment [for Option E1] are broadly consistent with the findings of the previous Jacobs work, demonstrating that these sites have multiple challenges from a transport perspective, driven by:

- Their rural location and subsequent poor relationship/distance to existing settlements/service centres, either within Warwickshire or adjoining areas of the West Midlands;
- The dispersed nature of employment and retail trips generated by a new settlement with limited on-site employment and the difficulty of serving those trip demands by public transport and active travel; and

- Resultant levels of high car dependency and longer trip lengths due to distances to nearest settlements/service centres.”

Conclusion

Based on all the above, MPC believes that further housing development at the Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield site, beyond that already approved would be unsustainable and would have a hugely negative impact on the surrounding area, including the village of Mickleton.

- The rural location makes any significant increase in local employment opportunities very unlikely.
- Even if such employment were to be created the increase in traffic volumes would have a catastrophic impact for road safety, pollution, and journey times for all users of the B4632.
- Massive investment in social infrastructure for schools, shops, leisure and health, would need to take place in parallel to the development of dwellings and workspaces in order to avoid overloading these resources in surrounding locations.

As such Mickleton Parish Council opposes any expanded development at the Meon Vale and Long Marston Airfield sites in the strongest possible terms.