

An Imaginary Journey: Wharfedale in 2030

Sir, I would like to take you on an imaginary journey through Wharfedale, as it is likely to be, if the Core Strategy is implemented, in 2030. Along the route it may be helpful to have the SHLAA maps for Menston, Burley and Ilkley to hand to help imagine the area in 2030.

Our starting point, if we can break into the traffic coming from Leeds, is the White Cross roundabout where the A65 from Leeds meets the A6038 from Bradford, just beyond the southern edge of the Menston map. The flow of traffic from the Leeds direction is slow moving and almost continuous making it difficult to ease into the slow procession.

As we travel, still in Leeds, in the queue of traffic towards Menston on the A65 we pass a ribbon of houses on the right before St Mary's Secondary School. The school has expanded since 2015 but as a faith based academy it can be selective and few children from Menston are able to attend this, their nearest, school. Since all the new houses were built in Guiseley, Leeds no longer allows Bradford based pupils to attend the schools there and many have had to travel long distances to find places. On the left is the site of the former Highroyds Hospital which was developed for housing around the turn of the century. Unfortunately most, if not all of the infrastructure promised under Section 106 agreements failed to materialise. Across the traffic lights and into Bradford, past the Fox and Hounds, we travel along a road built up on both sides, before glimpsing a small area of open land on the right opposite Menston Cricket Club. As we bear left at the roundabout we pass the new housing on ME/013 on the right.

Continuing along the A65 we leave Menston and pass between ME/007 on the left and ME/005 and 006 on the right. At this point the Jet2 flight to Palma passes overhead. The pilot is carefully following the Noise Preferential Route out of Leeds-Bradford Airport passing over what in 2015 was an area of open land (1). Looking back from 2030 the stories of agents trying to get prospective buyers of the new houses to sign up during a lull in take-offs makes sense, as at peak times flights pass overhead every few minutes. The airport was able to successfully defend a number of legal challenges by pointing out that the route was well established, and published in the Noise Action Plan, before the land was first considered for housing. Aircraft noise and the shortage of school places meant that initial sales were disappointing and not until the new primary and secondary schools were squeezed into the area was the development fully taken up. The schools were expensive to build too, because they needed a high level of noise insulation to prevent classes being disrupted by aircraft noise. Looking to the left as we enter Burley we see across one small field BU/002 that straddles Menston Old Lane and completes the development of the land up to the railway. Together with the Menston sites it joins the two settlements, some locally call it Bumston. Just before the Burley bypass more houses were built on BU/006 on the left an area of previously open land residents had appreciated.

Joining the traffic on the A660 from Otley we used to get a short burst of speed along the bypass but the traffic now often backs up all the way from Ilkley. Leaving Burley we pass on the left the extended BU/001, known locally as the Lapwing or Peewit Development. Manor Park is immediately on the right. Down a slight slope we are lucky the river is not in flood or we would have to turn round, negotiate our way through Burley and its many speed bumps and go over the Moor Road to reach Ilkley. At such times, or when traffic on the A65 is disrupted by road-works or an accident, the road-kill on the Moor Road makes nonsense of the notion of a Special Protection Area for any form

of wildlife. After Manor Park the A65 is sandwiched between the river and the railway embankment. The embankment has for a long time been the subject of major structural work to prevent it slipping and several times has had to have speed restrictions imposed while work has been carried out. The more frequent extreme weather events as the climate changed through the 2020s has led to an increase in the number of times the road at Manor Park Bends, has been flooded; this effectively cuts-off Ilkley from the east.

We pass a few old buildings and the Kashmiri Restaurant on the left before passing the Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits SSI on the right. To the left we emerge from the trees past the sewage works, which has been extended to cope with the new developments on the east of Ilkley. In 2015 the view opened up to what was one of Yorkshire's iconic vistas, clearly apparent a year earlier in the TV coverage of the Grand Depart, the open land sweeping up to the Cow and Calf Rocks on Ilkley Moor. Until 2015 Inspectors at previous enquiries had protected this view by turning down proposals to build on Coutances Way. It is fortunate you came then as now IL/014, IL/009 and even the land between the railway and Ben Rhydding Drive, are covered with housing; a school or two; and a business park. The idea of a park and ride facility linked to the resited Ben Rhydding station never got off the ground.

The Core Strategy proposed an area employment land that became the business park as part of its intention to make Ilkley more sustainable by generating jobs for local people. A worthy aim and a few local businesses were able to expand into the premises, but a recent study by the Parish Council and Civic Society found that most people working there travelled from outside the town because they could not afford the high house prices in Ilkley. This was despite the "Help to Buy," and more recent, "Assistance to Rent," schemes so popular with the house builders. Many of those that could afford the houses, just like in 2015, commuted to Leeds or further afield. As for commuting, the complaints about the overcrowded trains and congested roads are the most common expurgated posts on Ilkley Chat.

Getting through Ilkley was always slow, there were 9 sets of traffic lights in 2015, and over the years it has got steadily worse. Local shopkeepers blame the traffic and the all day parking by commuters in the centre of Ilkley for the decline in tourist numbers. The problem of parking was one of the main issues raised in the responses to the Parish Council questionnaire during the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan in 2015 and many locals long ago gave up even trying to park in town except when shopping at the two supermarkets. They have had to enforce their 2 hour parking limits to keep their trade.

Once past the bottleneck at the junction, another set of lights, where traffic from IL/012 joins, and it is rumoured that from IL/016 will also join, the A65, we at last reach open country and can appreciate the landscape of the valley although it is somewhat spoiled by the long queue of traffic coming from the Addingham direction. This has noticeably increased as the new developments in Addingham have been built, as have the residents' complaints about the delays they experience getting through Ilkley. A few hardy souls do use the new cycle way opened with much fanfare a few years ago but most still prefer to sit in comfort, though fuming, in the queue.

With development practically covering all the land along the A65 from Leeds to the west end of Ilkley it is hard to see how the Green Belt policies of the old NPPF, that aimed to

- *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; and*
- *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*

were applied, or to recall Para 5.6 of the Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document, Vol 8 Wharfedale, submitted to the Examination of the Core Strategy as PS/E021j, which read

“Opportunities for new development in Wharfedale are limited by the need to preserve the sharp edges of the existing settlements. The retention of the separate identity of the existing towns and villages through physical separation should be a long term aim.Any new proposals in Wharfedale should also be assessed for their impact on the busy road network along the valley and across the valley slopes towards Airedale, to avoid adversely affecting the attractive quality of life of both residents and visitors.”

For those who remember the valley in 2015 the Policy Guidelines in Para 6.3.3 of the same document

“It is important to prevent the spread of development which would destroy the identity of the settlements of Menston, Burley in Wharfedale and Ilkley.”

bring a hollow laugh.

Paragraph 1 of the introduction to the National Planning Policy Framework under which the Core Strategy was produced proclaimed that it provided, “a framework within which local people and their accountable councils can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.” The residents of Wharfedale who attended the Examination, many of whom were then working on Neighbourhood Plans for Menston, Burley and Ilkley realised that the needs and priorities they expressed counted for nothing. Although most felt that the Inspector had given them an opportunity to put forward their views, the way that the Council representatives dismissed them, while introducing modifications to suit the developers, made them wonder who the council was accountable to, and confirmed their fears that localism did not do what it said on the tin.

As for Wharfedale in 2030, it is still a pleasant place to live. That is as long as you don’t have to commute on the congested roads or overcrowded railway; try to park in the centre of Ilkley; have children who cannot get places at the oversubscribed schools; are a visitor wanting to drive through the town to the Dales; or a resident needing to travel to the administrative services in Keighley, the Principal town for the area.

- (1) Leeds Bradford International Airport, Noise Action Plan 2013-2018, available at http://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/media/1543/noise-action-plan_2013-2018_formally-approved-by-defra-on-4-august-2014.pdf

Graham H May MA(Urban and Regional Planning)
Independent Futurist, Member of the World Future Society, and
Former Director of the MA in Foresight and Futures Studies, Leeds Metropolitan (now Beckett)
University

