

The South Warwickshire Local Plan - Bridges and Loans.

Chapter 1 - Setting The Scene



Artists Image of proposed Shrewsbury Relief Road

As reported in February this year, Shropshire Council's proposed Shrewsbury Bypass project was officially stopped. This was after Shropshire Council had to receive a £190 million bailout to save it from going bankrupt. The proposed relief road was initially estimated to cost £74 million, by 2024 those costs had reached £162 million. By 2026 Shropshire Council had already spent £32 million on the design.

Chapter 2 - Loans

How Much is The Proposed Stratford Western Bypass / South Western Relief Road Actually Going To Cost ?

The Delivery Strategy and Cost Refinement report done by Atkins Realis in February 2026⁽¹⁾ puts a range on the cost of the Western Bypass **from between £170 million and up to £630 million**. The lowest cost option is for single carriageway road, delivered in 2035, with no contingency built into re-open the railway line between Stratford and Honeybourne. The highest cost option accounts for a dual carriageway delivered in 2040, with contingency for a railway line built in and better road connectivity from the Western Bypass to South Stratford.

Detailed studies by the Department For Transport⁽²⁾ on lessons learnt from the costing of more than 2500 projects, **found that early estimates on cost are usually too optimistic.**

Atkins Realis Option Assessment Report in May 2026⁽³⁾ seems to have initially forgotten the above figures, when presented in table format, where it is quoting **£80 to £100 million** for the Western Bypass. This doesn't allow for rail development and doesn't include better connectivity. Fortunately Atkins Realis had the sense to include a foot note stating **"with risk allowance and inflation allowance this figure could be £240 to £300 million"**. Also fortunately the experts at Atkins Realis include another quite a substantial note in relation to cost estimates. This note uses the phrase **"given the very early stages of project delivery"** as well noting the

values quoted “**should not be used for budget planning**”, Atkins Realis put this last statement in bold in their report as well.

Atkins Realis(3) quotes £210 to £270 million for a relief road which is single carriageway and includes better connections to Stratford and into and through proposed developments at STR2. No note is included for this figure as to what it could really cost as per the Department For Transport's warnings.

For fairness, other reports and views have estimated lower costs for the current proposed version of the relief road - some in the range **£90 to £180 million**. However you have to bear in mind with these, the previous, shorter, version of the proposed (and never delivered) Western Bypass was estimated by Stratford Town Transport Group(4) **in 2019 to cost £135 million**. I am fairly sure things haven't gotten any cheaper in the last 7 years ! The SDC Strategic Outline Business Case Refresh reference re-opening Stratford to Honeybourne Railway line report issued **in 2025(5)** estimated the cost of a relief road **in the region of £200 million**. It is prudent again at this point to remember the Department For Transport's **warnings** (based on a detailed study of 2500 projects...) **about cost estimates early in the development of proposals**.

You can draw your own conclusions. Based on trawling the depths of the publicly available documents behind the plan and reading the views of the experts at Atkins Realis, I don't believe anyone who claims even the most basic version of a Western Bypass will ultimately cost anything less than a bare minimum of £200 million, and that still feels optimistic.

How Will the Western Bypass Be Paid For ?

Will developers' contributions cover the Western Bypass ? It is very unlikely that they will just on their own, these contributions are also needed to pay for other infrastructure to support the SWLP as well, not just the Western Bypass.

Will Stratford District Council get a grant from Homes England ?, possibly. As of 2026 Homes England have more funds to distribute for infrastructure spending- some £5 billion (6). However, it is worth noting that every local authority in the country with significant house building targets, will be looking to dip into this. It is also worth noting that **the grant of £83 million**, Stratford District Council applied for, from Homes England for the **previously proposed Western Bypass - was denied(7)**.

There are rumors that councillors have been quoted as stating, if we don't get enough developers contributions to pay for the Western Bypass, **we will just get a loan. How feasible is this ?**

For councils getting a loan means going to the HM Treasury run **Public Works Loan Board (PWLB)**.

Lets be optimistic, and assume even with cost overruns, the total cost of the Western Bypass is £250 million. Lets also be optimistic and say the council only needs to borrow £100 million as developer contributions and a grant will cover the other £150 million. A £100 million borrowed from the PWLB, over 25 years, at an interest rate of 5.3% (the council's treasurers own interest figure for a PWLB loan(8)), would mean repayments of £7.3 million a year, a total amount paid back of £182 million over 25 years.

£7.3 million doesn't sound too high, does it ? When you consider Stratford District Councils net revenue expenditure in 24/25 was £19.6 million (*this is the closest thing you can call its budget - as other income is*

fixed to pay for things it must be spent on already), and its current borrowing limit is £25 million⁽⁸⁾, borrowing £100 million is suddenly sounding less OK.

Another positive though is the fact that Stratford District Council currently has zero debt, something absolutely to congratulate the council on. Also another positive is that Stratford District Council is estimated to hold around £14 million of cash reserves in 2025. However, Stratford District Council's budget forecast is that this will dwindle to £3 million by 2030⁽⁸⁾.

You may or may not be aware **Stratford District Council and Warwick District Council are merging in 2028**, and also taking on responsibilities of the county council at the same time.

Are Warwick District Council's and Warwickshire County Council's budgets run quite as prudently as Stratford District Council's seem to have been ? I am afraid the answer to that is no. On formation, Stratford District Council will become part of a unitary authority whereby the other partners will be bringing considerable debt and confirmed spending requirements with them. **The total capital financing requirement of the new unitary authority on formation could be as high as £698 million⁽¹¹⁾.**

At page 51 Appendix A "Key Balance Sheets & Wider Financial Risks", of report on Local Government Reorganisation presented to Rugby Borough Council in November 2025 ⁽⁹⁾, it states;

*"Capital Financing Requirement (CFR): this measures the amount of borrowing that still needs to be repaid to fund capital spend that has already been spent, i.e. the amount of capital expenditure that is not funded by capital receipts, capital grants or revenue contributions incurred. Warwickshire's CFR is projected to be £1,268m by March 2028 split £570m (45%) north and £698m (55%) south. Three quarters of the CFR relates to just two authorities Warwick District Council (29%) and the County Council (46%). There is a relatively higher CFR in the south than north, **which means there is higher risk associated with borrowing in the south and greater revenue costs of borrowing.**"*

Lets not forget, delivery of the plan, delivery of any Western Bypass and funding its infrastructure will be the **responsibility of the new South Warwickshire unitary council**, which, from the data above looks like it is going to start its existence carrying considerable debt and unfunded spending commitments - making it more challenging to borrow significant sums of money.

Optimism vs Realism

Let's go back a few steps as well, where optimistic figures were used. What if the cost overruns are higher ? Atkins Realis put the cost as high as £630 million for a dual carriageway. When more detailed studies have been done, what if a dual carriageway is really needed ? What if those developer contributions just don't add up that high ? What if Home England says no to a grant ? The answer, the council won't just need to borrow £100 million for the Western Bypass, the amount they may have to borrow will be significantly higher

You may think that accurate costs and confirmed funding are things that should be known before such a critical factor to the plan as the Western Bypass is included in the SWLP, and relied upon for its delivery ?

Who Ultimately Pays

Why does a council getting in significant debt matter ? Well the council's only confirmed guaranteed long term revenue stream are our council tax payments. Do we want to face these going up even more? Do we want to see services across the county cut to compensate ? All because Stratford District Council decided in their wisdom to propose to build houses where no suitable infrastructure exists already. This is when it does have

other options based around existing infrastructure. And all because over 10 years ago the government at the time decided to put a garden town in the middle of nowhere, with no infrastructure, on the promise of a Western Bypass that never happened !

Developments to the South of Stratford and the Western Bypass may not physically impact you. You may even favour that location as it prevents house building over your back fence. However, there is a **very real risk** it could **affect your wallet** for some years to come, **wherever you are based in the district !**

Whilst We Are Feeling Down

Lets introduce another painful fact, specifically for the residents of South Stratford, who were **suddenly presented with 2727 houses** proposed on the edge of Trinity Mead.

For this one we have to delve into Annex C of SWLP Strategic Site Selection Rationale(10).

For STR2/SG19 in its Refinement Summary it states "*The area will benefit from the Western Relief Road which will provide through access around Stratford Upon Avon*". Firstly through or around which is it ?? I am not sure both can be true at the same time.

No one from STR2 is going to use the relief road to get into town, or to get to the M40. They are all going to head over Clopton Bridge or Severn Meadows Bridge. The **Atkins Realis Options Assessment Report(3)** clearly identifies this (at page 82) and **puts it in black and white what all residents of South Stratford know already !**

Back to Annex C of SWLP Strategic Site Selection Rationale (10), it goes on to state in respect of STR2 "*The development also provides further opportunities for funding mechanisms to bring forward this along Long Marston and other schemes. Further enabling this infrastructure is a clear benefit of the bringing forward the site*" (direct quite including the grammatical errors).

What does this mean ? In plain English, it **means that STR2 has been brought into the plan to provide developer contributions to pay for the Western Bypass.**

So for **residents of South Stratford**, we are going to be **paying physically and mentally for the Western Bypass** - with all the extra congestion and construction disruption STR2 will bring. We will also potentially be **paying financially with higher council taxes**, to pay back any loans taken to top up the Western Bypass funding pot. A Western Bypass we most likely won't be using or benefitting from.

Thanks for that Stratford District Council.

Chapter 3 - Bridges.....

....or More Specifically One Very Special Bridge



Clopton Bridge was **built in 1484** and over 540 years old. To put this in context this was **8 years before Columbus discovered the Americas**. It is grade 1 listed and a scheduled monument. Its age and its heritage status are one thing, but have you ever sat enjoying a meal at the wonderful mediterranean no 1 restaurant, or a having a cold drink at the brilliant Boathouse Garden with a view of Clopton Bridge, the River, the theatre, the park and thought to yourself, what an absolutely special place in England this is. If you haven't I recommend you do, 2.7 million annual visitors to Stratford Upon Avon probably agree with me as well.

What do "we", the current custodians of our amazing town, do with this ? Do we protect it and safeguard its future, no we don't. We send 21,000 vehicles a day over it(3), including massive HGV vehicle carriers. What do we propose to do? build thousands more houses south of Stratford whose residents will also drive across it.

Does the Western Bypass help - well it may reduce the HGV traffic, does it reduce the overall numbers of vehicles that will use Clopton Bridge ?, read on....

The Experts Have Properly Considered This

This fortunately is a key question considered in the Atkins Realis Options Assessment Report(3) and central to the objectives of their study. **Without a Western Bypass, and all of the development proposed in the SWLP, Atkins Realis predict Clopton Bridge would see a 40% increase in traffic usage at peak times** (*Note - just like the Strategic Transport Assessment for the SWLP, Atkins Realis in their traffic assessment don't take into account that due to tourist demand Stratford is busier at different times, than the traditional monday to friday 0800-0900 and 1700-1800 peaks. Their report claims section 3 takes this into account, section 3 mentions tourist peaks are an issue, but there is no evidence within their report that it has been modelled in any way*).

This sets the scene for a relief road / Western Bypass.

What do Atkins Realis conclude in their Options Assessment Report (3) - if just the cheaper Western Bypass option is used ? If you want to check for yourself, Pages 89 and 90 of their report(3). It is worth remembering the current **Stratford District Council's seemingly preferred option is estimated to cost £80 to £100 million** - if you are being very optimistic. **Or, £240 to £300 million if you are following the advice of the DFT** Study on major infrastructure costs - and what the experts at Atkins Realis also really think should be followed.

Atkins Realis conclude;

- Including all the **development in locations that the current draft SWLP proposes**, without a link road (Western Bypass), **traffic around the town centre and Clopton bridge will become gridlocked.**
- It is difficult to establish the reduction in demand for traffic using Clopton Bridge that is achieved by the introduction of the Western Bypass, as the modelling tool is unable to measure the full demand for traffic trying to use the Clopton Bridge.
- The Western Bypass will be effective in diverting traffic movements away from the town centre,
- The Western Bypass also provides resilience by offering an additional crossing point.
- **However a significant proportion of the new trips** brought about by the local plan - estimated at around **40% based on current traffic modelling** - are still expected to travel to areas of Stratford north of the River Avon.
- Many of these new journeys would still seek to **travel via the Clopton Bridge.**

It is worth highlighting that at page 82 of their report, Atkins Realis highlighted that residents from new developments at STR2, existing residents from South Stratford and traffic from the A422 and A3400 Shipston Rd will **continue to use the existing crossings, including the Clopton Bridge.** Atkins Realis finish their conclusion by stating that a comprehensive sustainable travel (*buses, walking and cycling*) strategy needs to be developed.

To wrap this all up succinctly,

- We can't be sure exactly how much the Western Bypass will relieve Clopton Bridge, as the traffic modelling (*potentially not done at the right peak times*) can't work it out.
- We can be sure the majority of residents from existing developments in South Stratford will continue to use Clopton Bridge or Severn Meadows, and most journeys from new residents in STR2 will need to use Clopton Bridge or Severn Meadows.
- We really need a comprehensive sustainable travel strategy to aid the infrastructure plan. Note there is a slight issue here. The SWLP doesn't address this very well for South Stratford, a new park and ride - yes (*hopefully it is used more than the one in the north of the town*), however there are **absolutely zero efforts in the SWLP to introduce a strategic cycle network.**

Where Does This Leave Clopton Bridge ?

With all of the **development proposed around the South of Stratford**, even with an **expensive Western Bypass**, which it is unclear whether the council can really afford in any case, it is by no means guaranteed to see an overall reduction in usage. **Clopton Bridge is not going to get the protection it needs.** The centre of Stratford around one of the most beautiful and rich settings that any town in England has to offer, **will continue to be blighted by traffic.**

Chapter 4 - What Can Be Done Instead ?

There are other options, building on locations to the **North of Stratford, with railway stations and close to the A46 and M40**, that won't add to the pressure on Clopton Bridge. A significant part of the justification for not building in these locations is the fact they are in green belt land. It is prudent at this point to note that the green belt area to the North of Stratford is around 23,000 hectares - 23% of the entire district.

Maybe when caught up in the details of study after study, assessment after assessment, policy after policy our planners can be forgiven for **missing the bigger picture**. I am afraid I can't give the same forgiveness to the councillors who voted through this version of the SWLP. Their job is literally to see the big picture for the town and district. It is a saving grace our MP does, but unfortunately she is not in charge of the SWLP. Maybe our councillors have been misled ? maybe they have not had a chance to analyse and understand the details of the plan and the studies behind it as much as some of us have ? Maybe this piece has pulled together the wrong information ?

Again, developments to the South of Stratford may not directly impact you.. **We only have one 500 year old grade 1 listed 500 year old Clopton Bridge**, we only have one area around the river, with the restaurants, the bars, the parks, the swans, the paddle boats and the theatre, and all of the tourists and income they bring to the town. **We have lots, and lots of green belt land**.

Object to STR2 South Stratford, object to Long Marston Airfield, and object to the potentially huge financial burden the Western bypass will impose. All three are inextricably intertwined and interdependent on each other. **You simply can't be against one without being against all three.** LMA relies on a western bypass, the western bypass relies on STR2, STR2 will only increase traffic issues in Stratford and not help protect Clopton Bridge. To be a success the current proposed form of the SWLP relies on all three happening, in full, whatever the consequences, **when other more sensible and less impactful options absolutely exist.**

Send our planners and councillors back to the drawing board, produce a 15 year not 25 year plan, **work to the most up to date National Planning Policy Framework Guidelines**, work on a basis of existing infrastructure, not expensive new infrastructure, and give the people of Stratford Upon Avon District something much better for all of us and our heritage, not focussed on protecting a minority.

Jon Wright, 02/09/2026

Sources

- (1) Realis Atkins = Delivery Strategy and Cost Refinement Report - Stratford-on-Avon District Council 09 February 2026
- (2) *DFT Infrastructure and Projects Authority report "Lessons Learnt From Transport for the Sponsorship of Major Projects - Published 2019.*
- (3) *Atkins Realis. Options Assessment Report Stratford Upon Avon LongTerm Highway Capacity Study May 2026*
- (4) The Stratford Upon Avon Society, Trustee Report for y/e 31st December 2018. Stratford Town Transport Group Report by John Deegan 12 April 2019.
- (5) SDC Strategic Outline Business Case Refresh reference re-opening Stratford to Honeybourne Railway line report issued in 2025
- (6) Homes England and National Housing Bank - Investment Prospectus 2026
- (7) Minutes of Stratford District Council Meeting 12/04/2021. Page 9 of PAS Local Plan Route Mapper Toolkit Part. Local Plan Review Assessment.
- (8) Stratford District Council Treasury Management Strategy 26/27.
- (9) Report on Local Government Reorganisation presented to Rugby Borough Council in November 2025, Page 51 Appendix A "Key Balance Sheets & Wider Financial Risks",
- (10) Annex C of the SWLP Strategic Site Selection Rationale