

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: A14 Improvements – Highways Agency Consultation

Meeting/Date: Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) – 8th October 2013
Cabinet – 17th October 2013

Executive Portfolio: Strategic Planning & Housing

Report by: Assistant Director, Environment, Growth & Planning

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The A14 improvement project is vital to the delivery of the sustainable growth agenda across Huntingdonshire and the wider Greater Cambridgeshire area.

The scheme that is now subject to non-statutory public consultation by the Highways Agency, addresses many of the issues that the Council has been lobbying for over many years, including the proposed provision of a new off-line A14 route to the south of Huntingdon and Godmanchester, the upgrading of the A1 between Alconbury and the A14 and the associated removal of the Huntingdon Viaduct, which would create greater accessibility for Huntingdon and reduced traffic congestion on the local road network caused by traffic avoidance of current sub-standard route, particularly during traffic incidents on the existing route.

Recommendation(s):

Based on the information contained within this report, it is recommended that Cabinet agrees a response to the Highways Agency stating our support for the scheme as proposed, including our reiteration that our approved local financial contribution is conditional on;

- The overall scheme including the removal of Huntingdon Viaduct and the creation of an improved new local road network for Huntingdon; and
- That construction works commencing by 2016

Additionally, the Council recommends that;

- If the scheme has to include a tolling element, that this must be collected in a free-flow fashion and that the daily charge must be maintained at a level which is as low as possible (to be agreed) at a lower end of the charging scale i.e. £1 for cars and £2 for HCV's over an appropriate extended time period to be agreed between all the funding partners

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1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable a Council response to be made to the current formal consultation by the Highways Agency on the proposed A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has been a key partner in the development of the current proposals, which are now subject to non-statutory public consultation. It is vital that this Council remains engaged in this project in order to influence and help to deliver the best possible solution available for Huntingdonshire.
- 2.2 The first major improvement initiative dates back to August 2001, with the publication of the CHUMMS Study, which include various road-based options.
- 2.3 Eventually proposals were published by the HA (Highways Agency) to provide an 'Ellington to Fen Ditton Improvement Scheme', including a new off-line route south Brampton & Godmancheser rejoining A14 at Fen Drayton, then on-line improvements to Girton and eastwards to Fen Ditton.
- 2.4 Various challenges were made to the HA proposals and certain variations were subsequently proposed inc. different lane provision (3-lane and 2-lane options) and variants to build a new southerly route while also proposing keeping the existing route through Huntingdon open as a Trunk Road.
- 2.5 A Final Proposed Scheme was eventually published and subject to detailed design with Statutory Procedures moving forward until 2010 when, as part of the Government 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, the Proposed Improvement Scheme was cancelled as being 'unaffordable'. The previous 'Route of Protection' was also withdrawn but at the same time, Government announced a new A14 Study and an 'A14 Challenge' with a commitment given to explore alternative options and working arrangements with partners.
- 2.6 In response to the A14 Challenge, this Council, together with the County Council, South Cambridgeshire, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire issued a joint response emphasising the importance of improvements to the route to national and local economic prosperity and the need for a radical, multi-modal solution rather than a piecemeal solution. The statement outlined that without this the County's contribution to the economic and financial prosperity of the nation would be severely threatened at all levels. It was agreed that this Council would be represented on the DfT Steering Group overseeing this work and we also provided detailed technical input to the DfT Project Board, via the County Council.
- 2.7 This report seeks the Cabinet's initial view on the new scheme now being promoted but does not consider the detail of the Council's financial contribution to the project, which has been agreed separately.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 As part of the new A14 Study, the DfT carried out a three-stage study looking at a range of options in order to ascertain the best possible solution for the corridor between Ellington and Milton and they are consulting on the current proposals until 13th October 2013. The consultation also includes the options which have been discounted at this stage.

- 3.2 The proposed off-line section of the route to the south of Huntingdon is fundamentally the same as scheme that was cancelled in 2010 and is described below. The on-line widening to the east of Fen Drayton is also similar but the junctions and local road arrangements alongside the improved A14 are significantly changed and are also described below;
- 3.3 From the A14 Ellington heading eastwards and the A1 Alconbury heading south, the key issues are;
- a. Upgrading of A1 between Alconbury and new A14 from dual 2-lane to dual 3-lane carriageway
 - b. New off-line A14 2-lane dual carriageway between Ellington and A1 at Brampton/Buckden
 - c. East of A1, new off-line A14 3-lane through to Bar Hill
 - d. An A1198 partial junction at Godmanchester (west facing slip roads)
 - e. From Swavesey / Fen Drayton to Girton, a new single carriageway local road will run on the north side of the existing route and connect to the old A14 near Fen Drayton / Fenstanton through to Huntingdon in the west and to Girton in the east. This will enable Huntingdonshire residents to travel toll free alongside the route of the A14
 - f. Full junctions at Swavesey and Bar Hill connecting the local road network to the A14
 - g. The new A14 will be a free-flow Toll Road between the A1/A14 junction and Swavesey.
 - h. From Bar Hill to Girton, the A14 will be 4-lane
 - i. Girton Interchange has been simplified (compared to the cancelled scheme) and will provide and improve all existing traffic movements
 - j. Widening of the Cambridge Northern by-pass from dual 2-lane to dual 3-lane between Girton and Milton (Note – an additional 3rd lane between Girton and Histon is due to be provided as part of the HA Pinch-point programme in 2014)
 - k. The scheme will include the removal of Huntingdon Viaduct and the creation of a new road network connecting to Huntingdon Town Centre and Brampton Road. The current indicative layout is the same as that for the cancelled scheme.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 To be included after the Panel has met on 8th October 2013.

5. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 5.1 The only key risk for the Council is a failure of the scheme to proceed. It is imperative that the Council continues to lobby Government for the provision of this road and a construction start before the end of 2016 and the recommendations included within this report reflect that.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 Following the completion of this non-statutory public consultation stage of the process, the HA intend to make a Preferred Route announcement in late 2013, followed by further statutory public consultation on a detailed design for the whole scheme between Ellington and Milton. The scheme is designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the terms of the Planning Act 2008 and it will require a Development Consent Order, which subject to approval, is anticipated would be given in late 2014. This is then considered by the Planning Inspectorate and is estimated to take around 6-months.
- 6.2 Once this process is completed, it is estimated that construction work would commence in late 2016 and take 3 to 4 years to complete.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 This report covers the formal consultation process currently being undertaken by the HA and our planned response to that process.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Given the route of this project through Huntingdonshire, the Council will have a role to play in respect of the determination of the Development Consent Order application. This would include comments on the 'Statement of Community Consultation' and the submission of appropriate evidence.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As outlined earlier within this report, the financial contribution by the Council towards this scheme has been considered separately.
- 9.2 As the project moves towards the application for a Development Consent Order, there may be other legal costs associated with presenting this Council's case as part of that process. That has already been accounted for within our current proposed MTP.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Since the original publication of the CHUMMS Study in 2001, this Council has played a significant role in the development of this scheme to ensure that the best possible solution is achieved for the District. Officer time will continue to be needed as the project evolves and that is accounted for within current staffing structures and budgets.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 11.1 This Council has been an active participant in the development of the A14 project since the time of the CHUMMS study back in 2001 and our stated position has always been to support the upgrading of the existing route and to achieve the best possible overall solution for the District with an emphasis on dealing with the current unacceptable mixture of strategic and local traffic.
- 11.2 We have previously identified that the creation of a new A14 would allow several new development opportunities to proceed to support economic and employment growth, such as at Alconbury Weald and the regeneration of Huntingdon Town Centre.

- 11.3 We have supported the provision of a new off-line route on the basis that it would ease serious traffic congestion within Huntingdon & St. Ives and surrounding communities due to the current of the sub-standard A14 route.
- 11.4 Air Quality, Noise and Environmental impact issues currently exist within urban areas of Huntingdon and a new offline route is the only opportunity to address those, and additionally, at Godmanchester and at Fenstanton.
- 11.5 As part of our engagement work on the recent A14 Study, the Council has consistently lobbied for tolling levels, if they have to be included as part of Government policy, to be set and maintained at a lower end of any charge threshold i.e.£1 for cars and £2 for HCV's
- 11.6 The new scheme now being proposed is supported by a local finance package of £100M including contributions from various partners including this Council, the County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This Council has agreed a contribution of up to £5M, spread over a 25-year period with two essential caveats;
- i. That any contribution is reliant on construction works commencing by 2016; and
 - ii. That any scheme includes the final removal of Huntingdon Viaduct and its replacement with a new local road network creating greater accessibility for Huntingdon

Recommendation(s):

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

CHUMMS Study – August 2001

A14 Wider Study Challenge – Joint Cambridgeshire Local Authority response

A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Public Consultation Briefing – September 2013

A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Technical Review of Options – September 2013

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