

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvements

Meeting/Date: Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economy & Growth) – 6th April 2017
Cabinet – 20th April 2017

Executive Portfolio: Planning Policy, Housing & Infrastructure

Report by: Head of Development

Ward(s) affected: All St. Neots Wards, Gransden and The Offords

Executive Summary:

The proposed upgrading of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet is the final section of upgrading of the route to dual carriageway standard between the M1 at Milton Keynes and the M11 at Cambridge. In the longer term it will form part of the wider scheme to provide an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and this in itself will be part of other corridor improvements relating to the provision of an East West Rail link between Oxford to Cambridge with wider links to the west of England and onwards into East Anglia.

The current public consultation by Highways England looks at three route options, together with three options for Black Cat roundabout.

Feedback from this formal stage will result in technical analysis of all options leading to a Preferred Route announcement, together with a recommended scheme for Black Cat roundabout. Subject to a Development Order Consent process being granted permission and the allocation of funding for the scheme by Central Govt. it is likely that delivery of the scheme would likely take place as part of the Govt. Road Investment Strategy Period 2 (RIS2) from April 2020

Recommendation(s):

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economy and Growth) is invited to comment on the report.

The Cabinet are recommended to:

1. Support the adoption of the 'Orange' route, subject to any final alignment of a route east of St. Neots and confirmation that the existing A428 will be retained as a local road along its whole length between the A1 and Caxton Gibbet as outlined at Sec. 5.1; and
2. Support proposals for Black Cat roundabout in accordance with Option A or C that provides a free-flow route for the A421/A428 and the A1 through this

junction, as well as providing and all movements arrangements within the junction

3. To advise Highways England that any support is conditional on 'future-proofing' any A1 improvement scheme and that the current scheme would not prejudice or prevent that future route improvement
4. This route will eventually for part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Expressway scheme and that nothing emerging in terms of the design of this scheme must prejudice the wider Expressway proposals

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an outline of the current consultation by Highways England (HE) relating to the proposed upgrading of the A428 between Black Cat roundabout at the A1 in the west and Caxton Gibbet at the A1198 in the east.
- 1.2 The main purpose of the report is to:
- Outline the benefits and objectives of the scheme
 - Route options between the A1 and A1198
 - Options to improve the Black Cat roundabout
 - To seek a formal response of the Council as to its preferred option based on the above

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has been an active statutory consultee on various iterations relating to the improvement of this route over many years, particularly relating to HE Route-Based strategies and the more recent Oxford to Cambridge Expressway proposals. This position has been taken in order to ensure that the best position is achieved for the people of Huntingdonshire, and St. Neots in particular.
- 2.2 In the East of England, the Government is currently investing over £2 billion to create better and safer journeys and to support economic growth across the region and the wider United Kingdom. It is therefore vital that the Council links that objective to our own Corporate Objectives and, particularly, to the growth proposals contained within the emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (HLP2036).

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 The current route connects communities between St. Neots and Cambourne but it also acts as an important route to connect to the A14 in the east and onwards to international hubs such as Felixstowe and Harwich ports. It also connects Bedford, Milton Keynes and the M1 to Cambridge and the M11.
- 3.2 Improvements will support local growth, particularly around St. Neots, and reduce current congestion and delays and improve journey time reliability and increasing the overall capacity of the route. The scheme will also be 'future-proofed' to ensure that it will tie into and become part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Expressway scheme, this being a key priority of Government giving the commitment and development funding allocated to that scheme as part of the Autumn Statement 2016.
- 3.3 Likewise, and as part of the Government commitment to improving the transport infrastructure in the region, the A1 East of England Strategic Study is also looking at improving this route between the M25 to Peterborough as well as the East-West Rail scheme, which looks to establish a railway connection East Anglia with central, southern and western England. This latter scheme has also been granted funding as part of the Autumn Statement 2016 to further develop route options between Bedford and Cambridge and in our role as Local Planning Authority (LPA), the Council is currently working on those proposals with Network Rail and other key stakeholders.
- 3.4 The A428 between St. Neots and Caxton Gibbet is the only stretch of single carriageway left between the M1 and the M11 at Cambridge. The route is

currently used by both local and longer-distance traffic and users are subject to regular delays and congestion, particularly at peak hours, at Black Cat roundabout, around St. Neots and at Caxton Gibbet heading eastbound.

3.5 Highways England has six key benefits and objectives in developing the scheme, as follows;

- Enabling economic growth
- A safe and serviceable network
- A more free-flowing network
- An improved environment
- A more accessible and integrated network
- Customer satisfaction

4. OPTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

4.1 HE are consulting on three route options to provide a new Dual 2-lane carriageway between Black Cat roundabout and Caxton Gibbet. All options propose grade-separated junctions at both ends. All routes are shown at Appendix A. It is important to note that at present, they are simply indicative lines on a plan in order to give an indication of approximate alignments.

Orange Route

4.2 The proposed route runs east of Black Cat and after crossing the River Great Ouse and East Coast Main Line (ECML), it turns northwards and runs close to the current line of the existing A428 where a new junction would be formed with this road as well as the B1428 Cambridge Road. Thereafter, the route runs north of the current A428 and both Croxton and Eltisley before re-joining the existing alignment west of Caxton Gibbet.

Purple Route

4.3 The proposed route runs east of Black Cat and after crossing the River Great Ouse and East Coast Main Line (ECML), it continues eastwards before turning slightly northwards and passing less than 1km north of Abbotsley, then continuing eastwards and passing 1km north of Great Gransden before turning northwards to rejoin the existing route at Caxton Gibbet.

Pink Route

4.4 The proposed route runs east of Black Cat and after crossing the River Great Ouse and East Coast Main Line (ECML), it continues slightly more south-eastwards and passes 1km south of Abbotsley, and 1km north of Waresley, before turning slightly northwards and joining the Purple route less than 1km north of Great Gransden.

4.5 In selecting a route that the Council may wish to support and taking into account the consultation materials and other relevant factors in Section 3 above, it is difficult to conclude other than support for the Orange route. It is considered that this alignment would best suit the growth objectives of St. Neots, that it would better link to the retention of the existing A428 as a local road for communities along the route, as well as providing greater resilience in the corridor in being able to cope with unexpected incidents and events on either the upgraded A428 or the downgraded local road.

- 4.6 It is also considered that by careful selection of a final route alignment within the Orange corridor, that full mitigation could be provided in terms of matters such as Noise and Air Quality in order to protect St. Neots now, and as part of planned growth.
- 4.7 Conversely, while the Purple and Pink routes would provide a fast route between Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet for strategic through traffic, it would do little in meeting the growth objectives of St. Neots as there would be no connection between the town and either route, other than via the existing A1 and Black Cat roundabout.
- 4.8 Importantly, the Purple and Pink routes also cut through some of the best landscape in this part of the County and even with full mitigation being provided, based on the consultation information available, it is considered that the overall impact on settlements such as Abbotsley, Great Gransden and Waresley, would, potentially, be far too significant and adequate mitigation unachievable.

Black Cat Roundabout (see Appendix B).

- 4.9 Three options are proposed at this location, as follows;

Option A

- 4.10 This option would ensure that the A421 would free-flow straight through the junction onto the upgraded A428. Likewise the A1 would also become free-flow through the junction also, as well as the A421 eastbound towards the A1 northbound. The local road network would be facilitated by two roundabouts and via these, all movements in all directions would be facilitated. To achieve this, the interchange would be at 3 height levels.

Option B

- 4.11 This option would ensure that the A421 would free-flow straight through the junction onto the upgraded A428 as per Option A. However the A1 would not be free-flow and would continue to negotiate the existing Black Cat roundabout. Likewise, not all directions can be achieved via this arrangement although the A421 eastbound towards the A1 northbound would be accommodated. The interchange would be at 2 height levels.

Option C

- 4.12 This is similar to Option A in that all traffic movements would be accommodated with free flow between the A421 to A428 as well as on the A1. In addition, the A421 eastbound towards the A1 northbound would be accommodated. The difference between Option A, compared to Option C, in relation to the local road network is that this is accommodated via a single larger roundabout arrangement, compared to two roundabouts in Option A. The interchange would be at 3 height levels.
- 4.13 In selecting a preferred junction arrangement at Black Cat roundabout, it is vital that the A421/A428 and the A1 are free-flow routes so this would rule-out Option B. The major difference between Option's A and C are the use and scale of roundabout arrangements. It is felt at this stage, that perhaps the larger roundabout in Option C, indicatively shown at over twice the size of the current Black Cat arrangement, could lead to future congestion and perhaps two roundabouts as in Option A might be the preferred option.

5. RECOMMENDED OPTIONS

- 5.1 In accordance with Sec. 4.5 above, it is recommended that Cabinet endorse the Orange Route as the preferred option of this Council, subject to the following;
- It is considered that the current Orange alignment, while favoured, runs too close to St. Neots and the existing A428. In order to address future growth plans for the town and to accommodate a satisfactory level of mitigation measures, that the District Council support for the Orange route is based on the alignment moving eastwards from its current line
 - Confirmation that the existing A428 will remain as a local road between the A1 and Caxton Gibbet, particularly at the latter end
- 5.2 In accordance with Sec. 4.8 above, it is recommended that Cabinet endorse the principles of either Option A or C in relation to the future arrangements for Black Cat roundabout, with particular emphasis on the overall design needs for the road network through the roundabouts but that both the A1 and the A421/A428 must be free-flow arrangements.
- 5.3 Members will also be aware of the current A1 Study as outlined in Sec. 3.3. Following the Autumn Statement 2016, while it is understood that this work is taking a longer timeframe in terms of recommendations and future delivery, the Council's response to this consultation should make clear that nothing within this proposal must prejudice the delivery of a future A1 improvement and that this scheme must 'future-proof' any emerging details from that Study.
- 5.4 Likewise, although this scheme, when delivered, will eventually form part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Expressway proposals, again nothing emerging in terms of the design of this scheme must prejudice the wider Expressway scheme, including integration with any proposals that emerge for the improvement of the A1.

6. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 6.1 The Panel supported the Officer recommendations that the Cabinet should expressed support for the Orange Route and that either Option A or C should be selected for the Black Cat roundabout. Members noted that Option A and C will allow the free flow of traffic on both the A1 and A428.
- 6.2 A Member questioned as to why the previous work on the Black Cat roundabout was complete if Highways England are planning to change it again. The Executive Councillor for Growth explained to Members that depending on the option selected by Highways England in relation to the A1 project the Black Cat roundabout may or may not be altered.

7. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 7.1 None at present.

8. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 8.1 Following the feedback from all parties to this consultation, technical analysis will be undertaken, which will determine which option is the most suitable route to take forward, together with a proposal for Black Cat roundabout. This will then result in an announcement of a 'Preferred Route' for the scheme.

8.2 Projects of this nature are known as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and once a Preferred Route is known, a DCO submission will be made to the Planning Inspectorate.

8.3 Subject to DCO consent for the scheme and funding being approved by Central Government, current indications are that delivery would likely take place as part of the Govt. Road Investment Strategy Period 2 (RIS2) from April 2020. It should be noted that the current 3-year window to complete all the statutory processes and to obtain funding is an immensely challenging timeframe but the Council should give its commitment to work closely with Department for Transport, Highways England and other stakeholders in order to meet that deadline as far as is practically possible.

9. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND / OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

9.1 This scheme fully aligns with the following objectives of the Corporate Plan;

- Enabling Communities – our objectives are to:
 - to create, protect and enhance our safe and clean built and green environment, and;
 - to support people to improve their health and well-being
- Delivering Sustainable Growth - our objectives are to:
 - Accelerate business growth and investment
 - Remove infrastructure barriers to growth
 - Improve the supply of new and affordable housing, jobs and community facilities to meet future need

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The District Council will remain a statutory consultee to the emerging process relating to the delivery of this scheme, particularly surrounding the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. This will allow the District Council to make future representations on the scheme as the overall design emerges and as a Tier 1 Stakeholder, it is likely that the Council will participate in the Examination in Public that will consider the DCO application.

11. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None at present, other than staff time within the Policy, Implementation & Strategic Development team, which will be met from existing resources.

12. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The Council is currently undertaking a refresh of our Infrastructure Delivery Plan and it is important that current infrastructure deficiencies and proposals to address these, including this scheme, are included in that work in order that the Plan properly reflects such matters right across the District, including the strategic road network, that we may continue to work with partners to maximise delivery of infrastructure schemes.

12.2 The East West rail scheme, as mentioned in Section 3.3 above is being developed by Department for Transport and Network Rail. As part of current stakeholder engagement, both that project and this proposed scheme are

currently in negotiations to ensure that both projects work together and share areas of commonality. One important aspect in that regard are the overall Business cases for both projects going forward and to ensure that these are complimentary to each other, rather than competing with each other.

13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Route Options

Appendix 2 – Black Cat Roundabout Options

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Autumn Statement 2016

A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvements – Public Consultation March 2017

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