

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

13 JANUARY 2021

A46 NEWARK BYPASS CONSULTATION: NEWARK & SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL RESPONSE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To make Members aware of the consultation launched on 9 December regarding the proposed A46 Newark Northern Bypass, as part of the Government's second national Road Investment Strategy (RIS2). The consultation runs for eight weeks until 2 February 2021.
- 1.2 Given the timing of the consultation, over the festive period, Officers are not yet in a position to bring a full response before Economic Development Committee. As such, this report represents a holding report, setting out what actions have been taken with regard to formulating the corporate response and considerations that will influence our response.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The A46 is identified as part of the national strategic road network and although it is amongst the country's most important trade routes, in its current form it is not fulfilling its potential. This is particularly evident around Newark, where the change of from dual to single carriageway causes a bottleneck effect.
- 2.2 Spanning over 150 miles across central England from Tewkesbury to Humberside Midlands Connect has identified the A46 as a 'Trans Midland Trade Corridor' (TMTTC), highlighting the strategic importance of the A46 corridor, including the fact that businesses along it earn £115 billion for the UK economy each year, with an export rate that is 50% higher than the national average. Almost half the total comes from industries dependent on an efficient road network, like logistics, advanced manufacturing and agri-food.
- 2.3 As Members are aware, funding for the A46 Newark Bypass upgrade was announced through RIS2 in March 2020. The scheme seeks to improve journey times along this stretch of the A46, reducing congestion, making journeys safer, improving noise levels (in Noise Important Areas or noise 'hotspots') and enhancing cyclist and pedestrian safety. Also, critically, the scheme has a significant role to play in boosting economic potential, productivity, and growth.
- 2.4 After extensive lobbying to emphasise the importance of the A46 in its capacity as the Trans Midland Trade Corridor, other RIS2 works planned along the A46 will complement the Newark scheme with improvements to the A46 Coventry junctions at Binley and Walsgrave by 2025. This essential upgrade removes a major bottleneck, helps facilitate current and future planned growth and improves access for freight traffic travelling along the A46, one of the country's most important trade routes. The plans for the A46 corridor could add £7.1 billion to the UK economy. At the local level, the cumulative effect of the A46 scheme, along with delivery of the Newark Southern Link Road and A1 Overbridge will drive increased productivity and unlock huge potential, with much of the District's planned growth and many of the headline projects in the Town Investment Plan predicated on the increased highway network capacity that will be achieved.

3.0 **Proposals**

Options for Consultation

- 3.1 On 9 December 2020 Highways England (HE) launched its consultation on the A46 route design options. Having considered alternative routes for the A46, HE has concluded that widening the existing road to a dual carriageway, providing two lanes in each direction between the Farndon and Winthorpe Junctions, is the most effective solution. This approach performed best against the project objectives and can be delivered within the budget available, subject to detailed value for money assessments.
- 3.2 Both options would include a new link and a new bridge over the A1 to the north of the existing bridge, along with improved access to the A1 by removing A46 through-traffic from the Brownhills and Friendly Farmer roundabouts, allowing them to operate better. The critical differences between the options lie in the approach taken to negotiating the existing junctions at Newark Cattlemarket and at Winthorpe. The HE consultation brochure (provided as an **appendix** to this report) sets out the differences in more detail and summarises the potential impacts of each option.
- 3.3 Although on face value the consultation identifies two options for the road design, the official response form provided by HE allows for a more nuanced approach, including a number of multiple choice questions and some requiring respondents to rank elements in order of preference. Importantly, it appears that the response form allows supporting of a hybrid options, combining elements of both Option 1 and Option 2, pertaining to the Cattlemarket and Winthorpe roundabouts.

Shaping a Corporate Response

- 3.4 It is imperative that the District Council responds to the Highways England consultation proposals in a comprehensive manner, in order to positively influence the decision-making process. The challenge for Officers and Members alike is to be representative of the needs and concerns of local residents and businesses, whilst being cognisant of the strategic importance of the road and how this part of the A46 fits within the bigger picture of the A46 corridor as a whole.
- 3.5 The Council's response will give consideration to the merits and the potential impacts of each proposal, at the design phase, during construction (scheduled to commence in 2025) and once operational. Issues to consider may include, but are not limited to:
- Benefits of the proposals – economic growth and congestion reduction
 - Road traffic/congestion and management
 - Road safety
 - Journey times
 - Contaminated land
 - Air quality
 - Noise
 - Heritage
 - Landscape
 - Ecology
 - Flood risk and drainage
 - Climate

- 3.6 With the above considerations in mind, it should be noted at this stage that the environmental impacts of the scheme will be addressed and appropriate means of mitigation identified on the basis of the work likely triggering the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment.
- 3.7 In formulating a response the Planning Policy & Infrastructure Team is collating comments from Business Managers, relevant to their technical areas of expertise and, as would be the case when determining planning applications at District-level, we will engage with Nottinghamshire County Council colleagues to seek technical advice where relevant issues cannot be fully assessed in-house. Furthermore, Officers have worked proactively with HE prior to the launch of consultation, helping to identify relevant local stakeholders to ensure a wide coverage in terms of engagement and continue to work with HE colleagues to facilitate engagement with the Business community and developers that are operating in the area.
- 3.8 Following initial queries raised by some Members, Officers are taking time to engage with different sections of the community and landowners affected by the proposals in each option. The village of Winthorpe, to the east of the A1 is notable in this respect, given the proposed eastbound carriageway of the new section of the A46 would, to a greater or lesser extent under each option, move closer to the edge of the built-up area of the village than the existing road. Officers will therefore undertake site visits as necessary to assess the potential magnitude of these impacts – in terms of the potential noise impact on properties, particularly due to the proposed proximity of the carriageway in Option 2 and, more generally, the potential harm to the significance of heritage assets. Officers will also be liaising with the Gypsy and Traveller communities likely to be affected or who need to be engaged in the consultation process.

Factors Influencing the Council's Response

- 3.9 The Council, as Members will be aware from years of lobbying, wholly supports the principle of the proposal to upgrade the A46 Newark Bypass given the very clear local and strategic benefits it will deliver. This is confirmed in the Community Plan and Local Development Framework Amended Core Strategy, with the latter document identifying amongst its strategic objectives the intention to 'support and lobby for plans to improve the A46'. Similarly, Policy NAP1 gives explicit support to the implementation of strategic highway schemes 'A46 Link Capacity, Newark-on-Trent Bypass; A46/A617 Cattlemarket Roundabout; A46 Roundabout at Farndon; A1/A17/A46 Roundabout; and A1/A46 Brownhills Roundabout. The proposed work to the A46 is therefore critical in helping the Council deliver the planned growth set out in the Amended Core Strategy and in ensuring that Newark achieves its potential.
- 3.10 At this stage, Option 2 for the Cattlemarket roundabout offers 'grade separation' of the A46 from Great North Road. This is considered to be highly preferable with regard to traffic flows and journey times on the A46 itself. From a road safety point of view this option would reduce the likelihood of tailbacks from Newark in-bound traffic associated with the Castle Station level crossing impeding traffic flows on the A46, as is commonly encountered with the current road arrangement. However, conversely, there is also a greater likelihood of the flyover structure with this option having a greater visual impact on the surrounding area, while the aforementioned impacts of Option 2 on the village of Winthorpe means that a hybrid approach may be preferable.

- 3.11 Other aspects to consider will include the potential land-take associated with each option and any implications for other transport infrastructure.
- 3.12 Alongside the above highways works, NSDC also contend that while the work to the A46 is being carried out adjacent to the Newark 'flat crossing' over the East Coast Main Line (ECML) (where the Nottingham-Lincoln line intersects with the ECML – the last remaining flat crossing on the Network Rail network), the rail crossings should also be grade separated or at least this possibility protected for intervention at a later date.

4.0 Equalities Implications

- 4.1 Much of the wider community of Newark has been directly consulted on the A46 proposals by post. Those residents more directly impacted by the proposals have, accordingly, received more detailed information. The Council's Communications Team has also been sharing the programme of social media activity from Highways England. Officers are nevertheless mindful that many members of the community may struggle to engage with the proposals and have advised HE of potential 'hard-to-reach' requiring special consideration, including members of the travelling community situated on Tolney Lane which, of course, sits immediately adjacent to the A46.
- 4.2 The current COVID-19 crisis amplifies the problems that would ordinarily be encountered in the arena of public consultation, given that face-to-face engagement and the scope to put on public events is diminished, relying primarily on on-line events and also requiring that people have access to a compatible digital device in order to access consultation material. Highways England have therefore provided a telephone number for people to contact them directly if they are not able to engage online.
- 4.3 From the Council's perspective, the A46 is identified as a key piece of infrastructure in the Local Development Framework and in the Community Plan. Preparation of the former (in the form of the Amended Core Strategy) required that all policies were subject to appraisal against the Integrated Impacts Assessment (IIA). The IIA incorporates a Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The EqIA is a way of demonstrating the District Council is fulfilling the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

5.0 Digital Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct digital implications arising from this report.

6.0 Financial Implications FIN20-21/4602

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

7.1 Delivery of the A46 Newark Bypass is highlighted as a specific aim within the Community Plan objective of delivering inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Achieving this objective will help reduce congestion on the town's roads and, allied to the delivery of the Southern Link Road, has great potential to support the enhancement of the town centre, while increased road capacity will facilitate new jobs in the district that will contribute to increased opportunities for greater social mobility.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

To delegate to the Director – Planning & Growth, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Chairman of the Economic Development Committee and Chairman of the Planning Committee, authority to formally submit the Council's formal final comments on the A46 Newark Northern Bypass Consultation, which shall also:

- a. **Engage with as broad a cross-section of the community as is practicable and to detail these views and opinions in to a comprehensive response to the consultation proposals; and**
- b. **Identify the road design option(s) that the Council considers most beneficial in the local and strategic context.**

Reason for Recommendation

To positively influence Highways England's decision-making process and to ensure that the preferred option that is to be taken forward delivers optimal local and strategic benefits.

Background Papers

A46 Newark Bypass Public Consultation, Highways England 2020:

https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a46-newark-bypass-options/supporting_documents/A46%20Newark%20Bypass%20%20Consultation%20Brochure.pdf

For further information please contact Tim Dawson on Ext 5769

Matt Lamb
Director - Planning & Growth