

## **BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Report of:** Councillor Gordon Bambridge – Executive Member for Growth

**To:** Cabinet – 8<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**Author:** Phil Mileham – Strategic Planning Manager

**Subject:** Norwich Western Link route options consultation

**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to appraise members of Norfolk County Council's route options for the Western Link and to identify from Breckland Council's perspective a preferred route in order to respond to the current round of consultation.

### **Recommendation(s): It is recommended:**

- 1) That Cabinet endorses option 1 of this report which is to indicate route option C or D as the Council's preferred alignments for the Western Link.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 As Members may be aware, earlier this year Norfolk County Council carried out a public consultation which established there was very strong support for creating a new link between the A47 and Broadland Northway (formerly Northern Distributor Road). This was prompted by long-standing concerns about traffic congestion on roads and in communities to the west of Norwich and calls from many people to fill in what they saw as the 'missing link' between the A47 and Broadland Northway.
- 1.2 The majority of those responding suggested a new road as their preferred solution to addressing the transport issues in the area.
- 1.3 A public consultation on the options is being held between 26 November 2018 and 18 January 2019. The purpose of the consultation is to help Norfolk County Council identify a preferred option for a Norwich Western Link, which it intends to do by next spring.
- 1.4 The Council submitted a supportive response to the County Council's previous consultation identifying the need for the County Council to have regard to the strategic impact of traffic movement on the economy of the area, and seeking to ensure that any preferred route should minimise harm to sensitive environmental assets within the study area. The preferred route should also make a significant contribution to reducing 'rat-running' of traffic through rural villages by being attractive to users.
- 1.5 This report considers the impact of each of the options from Breckland Council's perspective, and recommends that the Council express a preferred route to feed back to Norfolk County Council's consultation.
- 1.6 It should be noted that further consultation on the detailed design would need to be undertaken by the County Council once a preferred route has been selected as the current consultation does not include detailed information on matters such as junction arrangements.

## 1.7 ROUTE OPTIONS

- 1.8 In response to the initial options consultation earlier in the year, Norfolk County Council has developed four route options for the purposes of consultation (referred to as Option A, B, C and D). Three of these are new dual carriageway roads and there is also a single carriageway upgrade to the B1535 make up the shortlisted options. While the majority of the new or improved roads would be built at or near ground level, viaduct-style bridges over river flood plains are included in some of the options. All of the routes also include improvements to the A1067 Fakenham Road.
- 1.9 The four routes have been published following work to identify which options would be most effective as a Norwich Western Link. The County Council has indicated that this work followed Department for Transport assessment guidelines and included traffic surveys and modelling, as well as gathering information on environmental and ecological factors in the area and developing a longlist of road and non-road options.
- 1.10 The shortlisted options, from west to east, are illustrated in the map at Appendix A. The following paragraphs describe and assess each of these in turn:
- 1.11 **Option A** – a 7.2 mile single carriageway upgrade to the B1535 and A1067, linking to the A47 at the Wood Lane junction north of Honingham. This option would significantly realign the current B road, smoothing it out to make it a higher standard route. The route would join the A1067 via a new junction at Lenwade and make use of the existing bridge across the River Wensum at Attlebridge. It is predicted this route would carry around 10,000 vehicles a day by 2040. The estimated cost is £60 million.
- 1.12 Issues relating to Option A**
- 1.13 This route is the farthest from the Broadland Northway (NDR), meaning that it is likely that that it will not form an attractive option for traffic within the study area, increasing the likelihood of vehicles originating from east of Hockering using rural roads to join the NDR. This is compounded by the fact this route is for an at-grade enhancement of the existing road network as a single carriageway link. This option would also result in a challenging interchange between the B1535 and the A1067 which, without very significant intervention, would be unlikely to adequately address traffic flow, but also would have a potential adverse impact on proximate sites (including the entrance to the popular tourist destination of the Dinosaur Park as well as adjacent property). The reduced attractiveness of the route is confirmed by this option expecting to see the lowest traffic volume compared to the other options, signalling that other rural routes would be used in preference, impacting on communities within and beyond Breckland.
- 1.14 **Option B** – This option proposes a new dual carriageway route and dual carriageway upgrade of the A1067 totalling 5.2 miles, with the new route to the east of Weston Longville and linking to the A47 at Wood Lane. At the northern end of this route, two alternatives are shown for how it could join the A1067. One would be via a new junction near Attlebridge which would include widening the existing River Wensum bridge at Attlebridge. The other would see a new 660 metre viaduct crossing of the Wensum created, joining the A1067 further to the east. It is predicted this route would carry around 30,000 vehicles a day by 2040. The estimated cost is £155 million based on the viaduct alternative as this has a higher cost.
- 1.15 Issues relating to Option B**
- 1.16 The principal issues relating to Option B are the arrangements for traffic joining the new link from the A1067, and a new junction would be required. This route is the second longest of the options presented and has a slightly lower vehicular carrying capacity than options C or D. As such, if this route were selected there is a slightly greater likelihood of additional vehicles using the surrounding road network rather than the Western Link. Option B would

also require traffic exiting the planned food hub to head west before it could head to the north via the Western Link. As with option C this option would require an improved connection to the A47 junction at Wood Lane/ Berry's Lane. This is proposed to be upgraded as a result of the dualling of the Tuddenham to Easton section of the A47 by Highways England. There would be an opportunity to align Highways England's proposals to the Western Link if this option were selected. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the sub-optimal junction arrangements at the A1067 and lower forecast traffic carrying capacity weigh against this option in comparison to other options.

1.17 **Option C** – This option is for a new dual carriageway route and dual carriageway upgrade of the A1067, linking to the A47 at Wood Lane and totalling 3.9 miles. Around 350 metres of the A1067 would be dualled before a new junction would take the route between Weston Longville and Ringland, crossing the River Wensum on a 720 metre-long viaduct.

1.18 It is predicted this route would carry around 32,000 vehicles a day by 2040, which according to Norfolk County Council's forecasts is the highest annual average daily traffic capacity of any of the four routes. The estimated cost of this option is £153 million.

### 1.19 Issues relating to Option C

1.20 Option C performs well in terms of its predicted traffic carrying capacity. Whilst the start of the route is further away from the existing NDR than option D, the closer connection to the existing junction between the NDR and the A1067 still makes this route attractive for traffic. The cost of option C compares favourably against options B and D when weighed against the predicted traffic capacity as there would only be a need for a single river crossing and more straightforward arrangements for the connection to the A1067. This option would require a significant interchange at the Wood Lane/ Berry's Lane junction with the A47. However, this would in part be resolved as a result of the planned improvements to the A47 to be delivered by Highways England which will improve this with a new junction. As a result, the improvements to this junction could be considered in combination with the Western Link proposals. As with options A and B, option C does not have as direct link to the planned Food Hub at Easton and as a result traffic exiting this site would need to head west on the A47 to join the Western Link and on through to the NDR.

1.21 **Option D** – This is a new dual carriageway route and dual carriageway upgrade of the A1067 totalling 3.6 miles. The route is similar to Option C at its northern end, however it then runs to the west of Ringland and links to the A47 further east at the junction with Taverham Road. Around 400 metres of the A1067 would be dualled before a new junction would take the route between Weston Longville and Ringland, crossing the River Wensum on a 660 metre-long viaduct, then turning more to the south and crossing the River Tud on a second viaduct, this one 120 metres long, before it meets the A47. It is predicted this route would carry around 31,000 vehicles a day by 2040. The estimated cost is £161 million.

### 1.22 Issues relating to Option D

1.23 This route has the second highest expected traffic carrying capacity of the options presented and would be an attractive route for local traffic looking to use the NDR. Option D relates well to the proposed Food Hub at Easton and would assist the movement of HGVs heading to the north of Norwich to avoid the need to use the A47 heading east to then access the western link (if option A, B or C were implemented). However, this route may have the most challenging deliverability due to having a more significant impact on the environment requiring the crossing of both the rivers Tud and Wensum. The need to cross the two rivers also results in option D being the most expensive option of those currently put forward. The delivery issues identified may also impact on the future scheme timetable.

### 1.24 Complementary measures to accompany route options

- 1.25 While road options were found to be the most effective as a Norwich Western Link in isolation, Norfolk County Council will still need to consider complementing whichever option is ultimately preferred with other transport measures. These would include walking and cycling routes and the implementation of traffic management measures on other local roads. This is in order that opportunities to maximise the use of non-car modes of transport are integrated into the proposed scheme as well as the vehicular link, but also to discourage traffic from using other rural routes for rat running, the effects of which adversely affect local amenity.
- 1.26 The current consultation does not provide the detail on such measures, and it is expected that these would be developed once the County Council has identified a single preferred route in due course.
- 1.27 It is considered that in the response to the consultation, the Council should include commentary seeking to ensure that walking and cycling opportunities are considered as well as ensuring mitigation measures are implemented in surrounding rural roads to discourage non-local traffic from using such routes.

## **1.28 Summary**

- 1.29 Each of the route options shortlisted by Norfolk County Council benefits as well as some challenges. Each option has the potential to improve traffic movement to and from the Broadland Northway (NDR) from the current situation and attract traffic to use the route that would otherwise use the rural road network in the area between the A47 and A1067 to connect to the NDR. It should be noted that all of the options will have some degree of impact on the sensitive local environment in the route area as a result of the construction of a new dual carriage way link or the upgrade of an existing route. Each option will also require further mitigation measures in the surrounding rural area to ensure benefits of the Western Link are maximised (i.e. traffic calming, HGV restriction etc.).
- 1.30 Route option A is not recommended as this 'do-minimum' option is unlikely to maximise the benefits to the strategic movement of traffic using the A47 to and from the NDR. It is also likely to result in the continuation of relatively significant amounts of traffic using the rural road network due to its poor attractiveness for vehicle users. As set out above, option B is also not recommended due to the poor attractiveness and forecast traffic carrying capacity as well as less suitable junction arrangements at the A1067.
- 1.31 Therefore, having regard to the issues identified in this report, route options C and D both provide significant benefits to providing an effective traffic solution for the Western Link. However, the additional environmental impact arising from the delivery of a scheme requiring two river crossings for option D also indicates potential delivery challenges that could affect the timetable. The relatively similar predicated annual average daily traffic capacity and lower scheme cost suggest option C is narrowly preferable in terms of delivery whilst still achieving the overall scheme objectives.
- 1.32 The Council considers that the completion of the Western Link is a key project to support growth and prosperity in both Breckland and the wider County. The currently consultation does not provide significant further detail on all of the delivery challenges likely to be faced with each option, and therefore in light of the relatively similar performance of options C and D, it is considered that both have merit and should be supported. The County Council will need to have regard to deliverability in making its decision to select a final route and this will need to be highlighted as part of the Council's response to this consultation.

## 2.0 **OPTIONS**

2.1 There are two options available to Members, as follows:

2.2 Option 1 – Members endorse route options C and D as the preferred routes in its response to the Western Link consultation. (Recommended).

2.3 Option 2 – Members endorse one of the alternative route options as the basis of the Council's response to the Western Link consultation.

## 3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

3.1 Endorsing Option 1 (route options C and D) is recommended as these route provide the greatest benefit in transport capacity terms of the options presented when considered against the forecast cost.

3.2 It is considered that the high forecast traffic carrying capacity indicates that options C and D will result in the least amount of traffic using other rural routes. The delivery of the scheme is also of key importance to Breckland and it is important that this is highlighted to Norfolk County Council as part of the consultation response.

## 4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

4.1 The benefits of the Council endorsing option 1 is that it will enable its preferred routes to be indicated to the County Council as part of the consultation exercise. This will allow the Council's views to be taken into account when Norfolk County Council undertake the remaining steps to identify a single route option to progress to the next detailed stage.

## 5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Transformation Programme; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

### 5.2 **Corporate Priorities**

5.4.1 The matters raised in this report fall within the following corporate priorities:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive
- Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth
- Enabling stronger, more independent communities

### 5.12 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

5.12.1 This report relates to a consultation being carried out by Norfolk County Council. As part of the launch of the consultation, representatives from Norfolk County Council met with the Chief Executive, Strategic Planning Manager and the Executive Members for Growth and Place to outline the process and the route options.

## 6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 This report relates to matters that will principally affect the Upper Wensum and Mattishall Wards.

## 7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.1 NDR – Northern Distributor Road (also known as Broadland Northway)

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Background papers:- [See The Committee Report Guide for guidance on how to complete this section](#)

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### **Lead Contact Officer**

Name and Post: Phil Mileham (Strategic Planning Manager)  
Telephone Number: (01362) 656803  
Email: phil.mileham@breckland-sholland.gov.uk

**Key Decision:** Yes

**Exempt Decision:** No

**This report refers to a Mandatory Service**

### **Appendices attached to this report:**

Appendix A Western Link Route options map