

Appendix 6.1

Staffordshire County Council Cabinet
Report, May 2010

Local Members Interest	
Mr. Mark Heenan C.C.	Stafford - Stafford Central
Mr. Mark Winnington C.C	Stafford – Gnosall & Doxey

Cabinet – 19 May 2010

Stafford Western Access Improvements

Recommendations of the Cabinet Lead Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure:

1. That Members note the outcome of the recent public consultation exercise undertaken on route options for the Stafford Western Access Improvement.
2. For Cabinet to approve the selection of the 'Green Route' as the Preferred Option for providing a new highway linking Martin Drive at Castlefields to A34 Greyfriars Place / Foregate Street via Doxey Road.
3. For Cabinet to endorse the submission of a Major Scheme Business Case for the scheme in order to demonstrate value for money to Central Government, and release funding to enable the scheme to proceed.

Report of Corporate Director (Development Services):

1. An integrated transport strategy is being developed to assist in the delivery of the Stafford Growth Agenda and meet the RSS housing and employment allocations in the period to 2026. The Stafford Western Access Improvements has emerged from these studies as a key element of this transport strategy, and a provisional allowance of £31M (against an estimated scheme cost of £36M) has been included in the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) for the West Midlands.
2. The scheme comprises a package of measures, including construction of a new section of single carriageway highway between Martin Drive and A34 Foregate Street / Greyfriars Place, to afford relief to A518 Chell Road, Tenterbanks, Victoria Road, Station Road and Newport Road. It has been assumed that the railway bridge on Doxey Road will need to be reconstructed as an integral part of the scheme. Providing this additional highway capacity to the west of the town will enable the removal of through traffic from the town centre, creating improved conditions for bus services, pedestrians and cyclists and opening up further opportunities to provide complementary sustainable transport measures within and to the town centre. It will also improve the access arrangements to potential development sites in western Stafford.

3. It is not possible to fund a project of this nature entirely from the Council's own resources or developer contributions, hence the need to secure its inclusion in the RFA programme and prepare a Major Scheme Business Case to secure the necessary resources from Central Government.
4. Views were invited on four route options for the highway element of the scheme, between 3rd December 2009 and 22nd January 2010. The consultation process was comprehensive and included the circulation of letters and questionnaires to statutory consultees, key stakeholders, elected Members and affected residents. There was also a two day public exhibition in the town centre, a full page advertisement in the local press and a dedicated Staffordshire County Council web page.
5. Responses have also been received from Network Rail, the Chamber of Commerce, local developers and landowners, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Stafford Borough Council, Castlefields Residents Association, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Staffordshire Police.
6. Meetings have been held with Local Members, the MP, the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Conservative Party, the Stafford Chamber of Trade and Commerce and representatives from the Castlefields Resident Group.
7. Widespread interest resulted in the return of over 900 questionnaires, with over 52% of respondents electing for one of the three route options, constituting a majority in favour of doing something. Of those expressing an option, the vast majority went for the Green route (34%), followed by the Yellow and Red routes (both 6%), with only 3% of respondents favouring the Blue option.
8. Following on from the Consultation Exercise an 'Options Report' has been prepared to;
 - Summarise the need for an intervention in western Stafford in the context of the Stafford Growth Agenda
 - Present a comparative assessment of alternative transport interventions to relieve town centre transport problems and,
 - Justify the selection of a Preferred Option to be developed and submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) in the form of a Major Scheme Business Case.
9. The Department for Transport requires that an Options Report is completed and forms an integral component of the business case for all schemes costing in excess of £5M.
10. Nine potential interventions were assessed within the report comprising; a sustainable transport package, a link to Doxey Road only, four highway options (that were the subject of the consultation exercise) and three additional route

options. Of the latter, two options were suggested during the public consultation exercise and one emerged as a potential lower cost alternative after a consideration the costs associated with providing individual sections of the Green and Yellow routes.

11. The Options Report concluded that Option F (Green) shown on Plan 1 should be taken forward as the County Council's Preferred Option for the purpose of developing a full business case, as it has the highest Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) at 2.46, and achieves 85% of the intervention objectives. It also delivers the best operational conditions (lowest degree of congestion) in both the AM and PM peak hours and it is expected that any environmental implications will be able to be satisfactorily mitigated.
12. Major Scheme Business Cases often also identify a sustainable transport package as their credible lower cost alternative. In this case Option A (Sustainable Transport Only), with an outturn cost of £4.028M (PVC £5.45M), constitutes the lowest cost alternative but cannot be considered 'credible' since it only achieves 50% of the intervention objectives and impacts negatively on highway users, in particular business users, and ultimately the local economy. It cannot, on its own satisfactorily deliver the Stafford Growth Agenda in transport terms. Notwithstanding this, the proposed scheme will include sustainable transport measures aimed at encouraging a substantial change in travel behaviour which will be necessary in order to manage the impact of growth in the town.
13. A variation on the Green Route was suggested by Bellway Homes and St Modwen Properties which involved a more westerly alignment and avoided the need to construct a new bridge over the Doxey Rail Sidings. Whilst this returned a similar BCR of 2.44 and could also be mitigated in environmental terms, it lies outside the strict definition of a 'credible lower cost alternative'. It has therefore been reported as a 'fallback' to ensure a scheme can be delivered in western Stafford, should negotiations stall with Network Rail over the delivery of a new bridge to take the road over Doxey Sidings. Being so similar to Option F (Green) it does not merit a separate independent assessment in the full Major Scheme Business Case.

14. A Major Scheme Business Case is now being prepared to DfT Guidance in order to demonstrate more fully the value of the Green Route in transport and environmental terms. Submission of a successful bid this summer would mean that Programme Entry Status might be achieved during 2011.
15. DfT rules require a 'local contribution' of at least 10% from scheme promoters and it is anticipated that it will be necessary to secure at least £5M from Developers towards the scheme.
16. It is still an early stage in the scheme development process and it would not be prudent to consider abandoning the historic Yellow Route until the practicalities of delivering the Green Option was more certain. Progress with on-going design works, land assembly and Statutory Processes will provide such certainty over in the period to 2013.
17. Key stages in the projects going forward will include;
 - Confirmation and publication of the Side Road and Stopping Up Orders
 - Submission and publication of the planning application
 - Receipt of planning decision (2012/13)
 - Confirmation and publication of the Side Road and Stopping Up Orders
 - Submission of the update major scheme business case to the DfT for consideration for Conditional Approval
 - Confirmation of Conditional Approval from DfT (2013/14)
 - Appointment of Contractor
 - Submission of the update major scheme business case to the DfT for consideration for Final Approval
 - Confirmation of Final Approval from DfT (2013/14)
 - Start of construction works (2014)
 - Opening of scheme (2016)
18. Stafford Western Access Improvements are considered an intrinsic part of the sustainable integrated transport strategy for Stafford for the period to 2026. This wider strategy will include delivering sustainable transport schemes supported by demand management techniques that promote smarter travel choices. Providing additional highway capacity to the west of the town centre will open up further opportunities to provide complementary sustainable transport measures within and to the town centre. These are likely to include; enhanced bus services and interchanges, improved access to rail services, urban traffic control and bus priority, walking and cycling links to the town centre, expanding pedestrian priority in the town centre and traffic management and safety measures
19. These complementary interventions will be financed through Local Transport Plan resources, public transport operators and developer contributions (via Section 106 agreements or the Community Infrastructure Levy).

Stafford as a Growth Point:

20. Following the recent Public Examination for the Phase 2 Revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, the Panel Report recommended the following development provisions for Stafford Borough over the period 2006 to 2026:
 - 11,000 new dwellings Borough wide
 - An indicative figure of 8,000 houses for Stafford Town
 - The potential for 1,000 additional dwellings at Stafford to meet the Ministry of Defence's requirements
 - Employment land 5-year reservoir of 40 hectares (ha) with a total long term requirement (2006-26) of 120ha
21. Members will be aware of the substantial amount of new commercial and residential development currently planned within the vicinity of the town centre, to help regenerate Stafford and enable it to provide the necessary employment and leisure opportunities to fulfil the demands of an expanding urban population.
22. Development on this scale has been supported by both the Borough and County Council, who previously submitted a joint bid to Central Government for monies to finance studies to support the emergence of Stafford as a New Growth Point for the West Midlands. Stafford has also been identified as an Impact Investment Location (IIL) within the West Midlands Region
23. The Stafford Western Access Improvements is considered to be a priority for the West Midlands Region (linked to delivering the Stafford Growth Point and the IIL) and the Regional Funding Allocation Programme currently contains a provisional allocation of £31M for scheme in the period 2012/13 to 2015/2016.
24. Central Government funding is likely to come under increasing scrutiny going forward and it would be prudent to submit a bid this summer to secure Programme Entry status for the scheme at the earliest opportunity.
25. DfT Guidance for the preparation of Major Scheme Business Cases is under constant review and delaying submission beyond this summer would necessitate a substantial amount of additional justification work to be undertaken.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

Legal implications:

A person whose land is blighted by future road proposals has the ability in law to serve a Blight Notice or Purchase Notice on the County Council requiring the Council to pay compensation for the loss in the value of the land as a result of the road proposals.

Resource and Value for money implications:

Until Conditional Approval is achieved the costs of developing the bid and other preparation costs will be borne by the County Council. After achieving Conditional Approval 50% of the preparation costs are met by the DfT.

The developer contribution of £5M is considered to be conservative given the amount of new development planned. However, the housing market is yet to return to its pre-recession level, and there is a risk that without sufficient economic recovery, developers will not be able to provide this level of contribution and prudential borrowing or use of capital reserves may need to be considered.

Developers could challenge the protection afforded to the route at a planning appeal. If such an appeal was successful, costs may be awarded against the County Council.

Risk implications:

The proposed approach is intended to minimise the risk of Stafford being unable to deliver the RSS housing and employment requirements.

Climate Change implications:

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be prepared to support the Planning Application for the scheme and this will include a consideration of any additional carbon emissions from plant and increases in vehicle mileage attributable to the Council during the construction phase. If the scale of additional emissions is deemed significant, a scheme of mitigation will be prepared and followed.

Modelling work undertaken to date demonstrates that over a 60 year period there will be a reduction in greenhouse emissions after the schemes' introduction (in 2016) due to more efficient car journey times. This translates into benefits of £0.16 M which scores the scheme as 'beneficial'.

Report author:

Author's Name: Nick Dawson
Telephone No: (01785) 276629
Room No: F19 DSD