

EXECUTIVE

DATE: 9th MARCH 2009

SUBJECT: CONSULTATION ON LUTON NORTHERN BYPASS
AND THE WOODSIDE CONNECTION

REPORT BY: HEAD OF ENGINEERING & TRANSPORTATION

CONTACT OFFICER: KEITH DOVE 547211

IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL	✓	STAFFING
EQUALITIES	✓	COMMUNITY SAFETY
FINANCIAL	✓	RISKS

OTHER**CONSULTATIONS:**

COUNCILLORS CONSULTED -Councillors Simmons and Davis

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CONSULTED -No

STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED Statutory bodies including local Councils together with various community and voluntary groups have been consulted on the alternative routes proposed for Luton Northern Bypass and the Woodside Connection

OTHERS CONSULTED

WARDS AFFECTED: All

LEAD EXECUTIVE MEMBER(S): Councillor Davis

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Executive is recommended to:
 - i) 'Strongly agree' with the local community's views that the outer bypass routes (options i and ii) represent the Council's preferred options for Luton Northern Bypass

ii) 'Strongly disagree' with the inner bypass routes (options iii-vi), on the grounds of the environmental impact and the significantly greater cost of those routes

iii) 'Strongly disagree' with the alternative measures to a northern bypass of Luton, on the grounds that, whilst the enhanced public transport services may meet some of the travel demands from the proposed growth areas, this option would result in worse traffic congestion (compared to the full bypass options) on east-west routes through Luton, particularly on Hatters Way and in the Montrose Avenue/Stockingstone Road/Hitchin Road corridor, together with the minor roads to the north of the conurbation

iv) 'Strongly agree' with option 1 for the Woodside Connection, on the grounds that it affords greatest overall traffic relief to the Dunstable / Houghton Regis area and will provide a more direct route to the M1 and, in combination with a northern bypass of Luton, to the A505 corridor

v) 'Strongly disagree' with options 2 and 3 for the Woodside connection on the grounds of their potentially greater impact on the SSSI and CWS environmental designations of the Houghton Regis Chalk Pit SSSI and CWS

BACKGROUND

2. In September 2004, consultants Halcrow were appointed by Bedfordshire County Council, Luton Borough Council and Go-East to undertake a feasibility study into potential route options for a northern bypass of Luton between the M1 and the A505. This included initial stakeholder and public consultation, that took place in late 2004/early 2005, about the current issues within the area and to understand what participants perceived the role of any future bypass would be. The results of that technical work, together with the responses to the initial community and stakeholder consultation were summarised in the report to the meeting of the Joint Committee on 24 November 2005. The report indicated that some of the route options should be discounted, in particular those routes that had a significant adverse impact on the Warden and Galley Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and recommended that inner and outer routes should be taken forward for a second stage of stakeholder and community involvement.
3. Further stakeholder consultation took place in February 2006, in the form of a facilitated workshop to consider in more detail the environmental issues relating to the inner and outer bypass routes, in particular those relating to the eastern section of these routes. The outcome of the second round of stakeholder consultation, together with further technical work, was reported to the Joint Committee on 16 June 2006. The outcome of the further stakeholder consultation was inconclusive as to whether to take forward the inner or outer route. Consequently the Joint Committee resolved to carry out further public

and stakeholder consultation on the two routes as part of the consultation on the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy for Luton and southern Bedfordshire.

4. The Issues and Options Consultation for the LDF Core Strategy took place between July and October 2007. The consultation document included questions about the routes for Luton Northern Bypass (Q6) and the Woodside Connection (Q7). The responses to the question on the proposed routes for Luton Northern Bypass showed that opinion was divided on whether an inner or outer route should be built and, particularly in the context of the eastern section, if a bypass should be built at all. Opinion on the route of the Woodside Connection favoured a direct link to Junction 11A on the M1.
5. However, the Issues and Options Consultation for the Core Strategy was focused on the spatial distribution of the development, and it was not possible to present the level of information to enable the local community to make a proper comparison of the route options. The Joint Committee therefore agreed at its meeting on 30 June 2008 to carry out a separate public consultation exercise into the route options for these two schemes. Funding for the further technical work was obtained from the third round of Growth Area Funding, which was approved in March 2008.
6. A full public consultation based on the detailed appraisal work was carried out in January/February 2009, and a copy of the consultation leaflet and questionnaire is included at Appendix A. Members should note that the option numbers referred to in this report relate to the nomenclature set out in questions 1 (Woodside Connection) and 2 (Luton Northern Bypass) of the consultation leaflet. Where it has been necessary to refer to specific sections of any of the northern bypass options, these are based on the colours of each route section as used in the consultation leaflet.
7. The outcome of the consultation has been used to define the preferred routes for these two schemes in the Core Strategy consultation for the LDF. The purpose of this report is to formally present the Borough Councils response to the consultation, informed by the comments received from local residents and key Stakeholders.

REPORT

Consultation arrangements

8. Public exhibitions of the proposals were held between Saturday 24 and Saturday 31 January 2009. A consultation leaflet distributed to all households in Luton Dunstable and Houghton Regis together with surrounding villages included details of the dates and times of the exhibitions, and these were also advertised locally in the press and on radio. A copy of the consultation leaflet is included at Appendix A to this report. Further exhibitions were held at South Bedfordshire District Council offices between 2 and 4 February, Cassell Hall in

Lilley on 5 February and at Stopsley Baptist Church on 9 February. More than 1800 people attended the exhibitions during this period.

9. A stakeholder workshop on the Luton Northern Bypass proposals was held at the University of Bedfordshire (Park Square campus) on Saturday 31 January, to which local Councils, community and voluntary organisations were invited. The first session included presentations about the national, regional and local policy background, together with the outcome of the appraisal of the Bypass options and the non-bypass alternative which includes enhanced public transport. In the second session, delegates were assigned to four groups, led by facilitators from the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, and tasked with coming to an agreed view about the preferred option. Stephen Joseph from the Campaign for Better Transport provided the opening and closing speeches, and in both he indicated that the by-pass was appropriate as long as it was supported by public transport and alternative travel options.
10. Appendices B and C to this report summarise the questionnaire responses analysed and the views of key stakeholders, together with relevant transport and environmental information for both Luton Northern Bypass (Appendix B) and the Woodside Connection (Appendix C). The rest of this report summarises the key issues for each scheme, and draws conclusions to inform the Borough Councils response to the consultation.

Consultation response and technical issues regarding Luton Northern Bypass

- 11.. The various transport and environmental aspects of the appraisal of the outer (Green or Grey, plus Black) routes (options i or ii) and inner (Orange or Blue, plus Red or Brown) routes (options iii-vi) for Luton Northern Bypass, together with the non-bypass option, are summarised in Table 1 below. This shows that, apart from issues relating to the natural environment, the impact of all these options is broadly similar, although the outer bypass results in a greater level of highway accessibility than the inner route.

Table 1- Anticipated impacts of Luton Northern Bypass options

Description	Congestion in Luton	Highway-based Accessibility	Accidents	Air Quality	Landscape	Heritage of Historic Resources	Biodiversity
Full Bypass Outer alignment	Moderate benefit	Large benefit	Moderate benefit	Moderate benefit	Large adverse	Moderate adverse	Slight adverse
Full Bypass Inner alignment	Moderate benefit	Slight benefit	Red route: Slight Adverse	Moderate benefit	Slight adverse	Large adverse	Large adverse
			Brown route: Moderate benefit				
No Bypass + enhanced Public Transport	Moderate benefit	Neutral	Moderate benefit	Moderate benefit	N/A	N/A	N/A

12. A total of 2117 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire responses received indicated the clearest support from the local community was for the two outer bypass routes (about 910 strongly support option i & 800 strongly support option ii), and little support for the inner bypass routes (options iii-vi) with around 200 to 350 people preferring these options. Just under 650 respondents agreed with the non-bypass option. In contrast the views of Stakeholder groups involved in the consultation resulted in no overall preference, as demonstrated by the following points that have emerged from the assessment of their responses:
- North Hertfordshire District Council and Lilley Parish Council do not want the eastern section of the outer bypass, and the Warden Hill Residents Association do not want either of the inner routes
 - Environmental organisations are concerned about the environmental impacts particularly of the eastern section, and prefer the non-bypass option
 - The Stakeholder workshops felt that, if the bypass was needed to provide new homes and jobs north of Luton, the 'blue' or 'orange' routes were preferable, but they could not reach consensus on the eastern section of these inner routes because of their environmental impact
 - The Stakeholder workshops concluded that if the bypass was necessary then it should be part of a package of sustainable travel measures
- 13 The transport appraisal indicates that, apart from the non-bypass alternative, all of the full bypass options provide a similar amount of traffic relief in the north of Luton. The full bypass options all result in reduced congestion and improved journey times in the north of Luton, with significant reductions in particular in the Icknield Way/Bramingham Road/Leagrave High Street corridor and on New Bedford Road. The provision of just the western section of the northern bypass results in less traffic relief, particularly on Hatters Way and in the Montrose Avenue/Stockingstone Road/Hitchin Road corridor together with the minor roads to the north of the conurbation, and a significant increase in traffic on the A6 north of Luton.
- 14 The non-bypass option would also provide less traffic relief than the full bypass options (and therefore less relief to congestion) in the same route corridors as the shorter northern bypass.. However, to fulfil our Statutory obligation in line with Government policy, it will be necessary to further develop and assess the non-bypass option as development of any preferred bypass route progresses following the consultation.
15. Whilst the Council fully supports the inclusion of a package of sustainable transport measures, it would not be appropriate to suggest that a package which does not include a bypass can achieve all of the same benefits as a bypass. For example the bus priority measures on New Bedford Road and Hitchin Road, included in the non-bypass assessment, will be very difficult to provide without significantly reducing the traffic levels on those corridors, which can only be achieved if the Luton Northern Bypass is provided.

16. The transport appraisal also shows that there is little significant difference between the traffic relief afforded by the inner and outer bypass options. However the inner options provide slightly more relief to the Bedford Road corridor, because they encourage more use by local trips, whereas the outer bypass has a greater proportion of strategic traffic. Comparing the two inner routes over this section, the 'Blue' route completely avoids the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) whereas the 'Orange' route marginally encroaches on this area. However it is clear that it would not be possible to deliver 4500 new homes and additional employment sites north of Luton between the alignment of the 'Blue' route and the existing urban area, without either increasing the housing density, building north of the bypass line, or putting some of the new homes and employment elsewhere.
17. In considering the bypass alignment for the eastern section, there is clearly a fine balance between the various environmental considerations. However the inner route options over this section will particularly impact on existing properties in the north east of Luton, and also have a significantly greater cost. The inner bypass routes are almost £100m more expensive because of the need for a section of tunnel through the scarp slope at Bradgers Hill together with more extensive mitigation measures to minimise the impact on nearby properties. The inner options are therefore likely to require a greater proportion of the costs to be funded from other sources, and are therefore less likely to be deliverable.
18. On balance the recommendation is a clear preference for the outer options. The environmental impacts of the 'Black' route could be minimised by including sections of cut and cover tunnel through the most sensitive parts of that route, in particular the woods at the foot of Galley Hill and Wards wood, minimising severance of the extensive Rights of Way in this area. The current cost estimates exclude the cost of providing cut and cover tunnel (about 500 metres long) in each of these two areas. The additional cost of providing short sections of tunnel in these two areas, based on costs of the tunnel at Baldock, would be about £42m. Whilst this would increase the overall cost of the outer bypass options to about £105m, it would still result in this option being deliverable given the healthier Benefit Cost Ratio for the outer bypass compared to the inner options.

Consultation response and technical issues regarding the Woodside Connection

19. The various transport and environmental aspects of the appraisal of the Woodside Connection are summarised in Table 2 below. Members should note that this table is slightly different to that contained in the questionnaire because of slight changes to the traffic model in the Woodside area. Regardless of which table is used, overall option 2 has the greatest benefit, although both options 2 and 3 have a large adverse impact in terms of landscape and biodiversity.

Table 2- Anticipated impacts of Woodside Connection options

Combined										
Woodside Connection option	Congestion in:		Highway-based Accessibility in:			Accidents		Air Quality		Landscape
	Dunstable	Houghton Regis	Dunstable	Houghton Regis	Luton	Dunstable	Houghton Regis	Dunstable	Houghton Regis	
Option 1: M1 Junction 11A to Poynters Road / Porz Avenue	Slight benefit	Moderate benefit	Large benefit	Neutral - Slight adverse	Neutral - Slight benefit	Large benefit	Large benefit	Slight benefit	Slight adverse	Moderate adverse
Option 2: A5 to Boscombe Road / Porz Avenue	Large benefit	Large benefit	Large benefit	Neutral - Slight benefit	Slight benefit	Slight benefit	Large benefit	Slight benefit	Slight benefit	Large adverse
Option 3: A5120 to Boscombe Road / Porz Avenue	Large benefit	Large benefit	Large benefit	Slight benefit	Neutral - Slight benefit	Neutral	Large benefit	Slight benefit	Neutral	Large adverse

20. A total of 2117 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire responses indicate a preference for options 1 (joins the A5-M1 link at the planned M1 Jct 11a) or 2 (joins the A5-M1 link at the A5120), with about 700 and 600 people respectively preferring these routes. The feedback received from key Stakeholders indicates a preference for option 1. The main exception to this is the response from the Highways Agency, who have indicated a preference for option 2, and expressed concerns about the impact of Option 1 on the operation of the proposed M1 Junction 11a
21. The transport appraisal of the three options indicates that options 1 and 2 attract the greatest amount of traffic onto the new road. However option 1 provides the greatest traffic relief to key routes in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. Option 1 is also the quickest and most direct route to the proposed M1 Junction 11a, an important consideration given the strategic nature of goods vehicle movements to/from the existing Woodside employment area and the planned growth of the area. Options 2 and 3 both have a potentially greater impact on the Marl Lakes SSSI and the Houghton Regis Chalk Pit County Wildlife Site (CWS).
22. Taking all of the above matters into account, the Council therefore 'strongly agrees' with option 1 and 'strongly disagrees' with options 2 and 3.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

23. The need to undertake Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA) will be considered as each scheme is developed. Many highway schemes tend to have impacts on all residents/ businesses in close proximity to the scheme and as such has been considered as part of the consultation process. Agreed by the Borough Council's Environment & Regeneration Equalities Coordinator on 3 March 2009.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

24. Each of the schemes being promoted by the Borough or Central Bedfordshire Councils will need to progress through the various stages of the Governments

funding approvals process. It will also need to be ensured that the business case for these schemes is robust enough for the purposes of funding approval and that the individual schemes are affordable in terms of capital expenditure as well as on-going revenue costs. Where major schemes may impact on each other, it is essential that the requirements, and timing of works, for each scheme are considered to ensure that value for money is achieved and that duplication of work is minimised.

25. The current economic climate means that local authorities are experiencing difficulties attracting firm s106 contributions which may affect some of the above projects. Land values and the construction industry generally have also been affected which could create capacity issues in terms of delivering these schemes.
26. These implications were agreed by the Borough Council's Environment and Regeneration Finance Manager on 4 March 2009.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

27. There are no legal implications to be considered. Agreed by Richard Stevens, Luton Borough Council Legal Services, on 3 March 2009.

COUNCILLOR CONSULTATIONS

28. All Members were invited to attend the public exhibitions.

OPTIONS

29. The alternative options to an outer bypass would be an inner bypass route or no bypass at all. It is clear that an inner bypass would impact on the quality of life of residents living in the Bushmead area of town. A non-bypass solution, which puts greater emphasis on walking, cycling and public transport (including Park and Ride) would result in less traffic relief to the Bedford Road corridor and Montrose Avenue/Stockingstone Road/Hitchin Road Corridor. Furthermore, without the traffic relief afforded by a bypass some of the public transport measures proposed in the non-bypass option would result in significantly reduced highway capacity on New Bedford Road and the dual carriageway section of Hitchin Road.

APPENDICES

Appendix A- North Dunstable and North Luton consultation leaflet – Attached for Members only

Appendix B- Summary of consultation responses & technical work on Luton Northern
Bypass
Appendix C-Summary of consultation responses & technical work on the Woodside
Connection

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to and minutes of Joint Committee on 24 November 2005.

Report to and minutes of Joint Committee on 16 June 2006

APPENDIX A

North Dunstable and North Luton consultation leaflet