

High Wycombe Local Devolved Major Scheme. Outline Business Case High Wycombe Town Centre/ Southern Quadrant (HWTCMPSQ): Options Assessment

Executive Summary

- 1) The High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan forms a key part of Wycombe District Council's Delivery and Site Allocations Development Plan Document and of Buckinghamshire County Council's Local transport Plan
- 2) Implementation of the Masterplan has begun with construction of the Westbourne Street link road – part of the Alternative Route around the town centre - which was funded by a combination of capital funding from both WDC and BCC, and from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- 3) Further phases of the Masterplan, together with key schemes in the Cressex or *Southern Quadrant* area have been included within the High Wycombe Local Devolved Major Scheme, part of the Local Growth Deal 2014.
- 4) The full Major Scheme includes the completion of the Alternative Route – along Desborough Road/Lily's Walk, across the Gas Works on a new road link, and along Queen Alexandra Road to the bottom of Marlow Hill; as well as highway and public realm improvements at Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street, at Abbey Way Gyratory, at Oxford Road/Bridge Street, and at the Dovecot Road gyratory.
- 5) The Masterplan does not, at present, include the closure of Abbey Way Flyover, the long term future of which is being kept under review.
- 6) Schemes were to be funded through Local Authority Contribution, CIL, and through Local Growth funding secured by the BTVLEP. In order to release funding from the LEP, an Outline Business Case, complying with DfT requirements, has been completed.
- 7) The Outline Business Case (OBC) shows that the full programme of schemes provides a number of important benefits, however the estimate of costs also shows that the programme cannot be completed in full by 2019 within the available budget.
- 8) This report provides an update on the funding and sets out the approach that has been taken to bring costs within budget and based on this work, the options to proceed, taking account of impacts and benefits. Taking account of deliverability, traffic performance and wider benefits, it is recommended that funds are released for implementation of a programme that is reduced in scope up to 2019. There is the potential for implementation of the town centre schemes to continue after 2019 outside the scope of the current Local Growth Deal.

Specifically, this report recommends the reduced scope package to include:

- The completion of the Alternative Route including the Gas Works link
- Changes to the Cressex Road / Cressex Link Road junction
- Cressex Cycle Scheme
- And either the Oxford Road Roundabout scheme. Or the Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street scheme – the final choice between these to be made jointly by the two Councils in

consultation with the Local Enterprise Partnership, at a later date when further work has been undertaken.

This further work will include design work to assess the potential to return (or remake) the River Wye to the A40 Oxford Road, to ensure any public realm works do not prejudice this in the future, and to better understand the costs associated with implementation in isolation and alongside the Oxford Road roundabout scheme. In parallel funding opportunities will be considered and explored. The cost of works to remake the river lie outside the scope of this Local Growth Deal, and hence these costs are not included but if funds are secured the works could possibly be constructed in parallel with highway and public realm changes.

Introduction

- 9) Against the backdrop of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) which sets out infrastructure priorities and ambitions through to 2031 a 'Local Growth Deal' was agreed in 2014 by the Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP) and central Government covering the period 2015 to 2019. This included the High Wycombe Town Centre/ Southern Quadrant (HWTCMP/SQ) programme of schemes which was identified as a jointly-agreed priority that the partners agreed to co-invest in. As part of BTVLEP's successful Growth Deal, a central Government commitment of £8.5m was secured for the scheme.
- 10) This report is intended to be read with the OBC and sets out the options going forward to deliver the planned improvements. It is being considered by both the BTVLEP and by WDC in parallel as part of the decision making process to confirm the allocation and the staged release of funding.
- 11) The OBC describes the individual schemes that together form the High Wycombe Town Centre / Southern Quadrant programme or Major Scheme and assesses these according to DfT criteria that reflect economic environmental and social impacts (with these impacts summarised in an Appraisal Summary Table).
- 12) As a transport led regeneration scheme focused on the historic town centre within the largest town in the County, the overall programme of schemes is not intended or expected to achieve journey time savings for traffic and for this reason a traditional Value for Money (VfM) case which focuses on achieving a high benefit-cost ratio (BCR) has not been developed as part of the OBC. However assessed against a wide range of benefits there is a good case to proceed with the Major Scheme. More details of the assessment are set out in the OBC which is summarised in the Appraisal Summary Table (AST). This is reproduced on page 9 of this report, updated to include the alternative options being recommended.

Costs and Funding

- 13) As part of the work of developing the OBC the concept design has been refreshed, traffic impacts modelled and updated cost estimates have been prepared. To further ensure that cost estimates are robust the costs described in the March 2016 OBC have been further reviewed following a review of scheme designs and taking account of current market rates. This "best" cost estimate, is set out in appendix 1 together with the cost estimates from the Strategic Business case and from the Outline Business Case for comparison. A Low Cost Option has also been included – details are set out at paragraph 20b. This work has helped establish a robust cost basis that enables decisions to be informed and risks managed, however the work carried out has also

made clear that delivering all the schemes in the programme is unaffordable within the budget available.

- 14) Compared to the Strategic Business case in March 2014 the March 2016 OBC cost estimates are within 5% of the figure that was originally put forward as part of the Local Growth Deal. However in deciding on the funding award the allowance for optimism bias of 44% was stripped out at the request of the Department for Transport (whilst making an allowance for inflation). This had the effect of significantly reducing the funds allocated (£15.38m, compared to an estimated cost in March 2014 of £19.84m). However the most recent work suggests that these cost estimates remain optimistic and it is considered prudent to reflect the higher cost of schemes in the budget being put forward.
- 15) Part of the overall £15.38m Local Growth Deal funding was a contribution of public sector revenue funding amounting to £1.27m, including £275,000 capital funding to deliver design and preparatory work across the schemes and a notional 5% figure (£1.00m) non cashable contribution related to contract and project management activities.
- 16) Buckinghamshire County Council is no longer in a position to make a contribution towards the local authority costs of the project management resources as changes have been made to the funding structure of the County so that such posts are now required to be capitalised against projects and it is now seeking to recover such costs against the capital cost of the scheme estimated at £360,000 over the three years of the Growth deal. The District Council is providing a contribution in kind of officer time to the project estimated at £120,000 in value over the three years of the Growth deal.
- 17) BCC has already forward funded as at 31st March 2016 at least £675,000 of scheme deliverables including the Business Case costs and the Alternative Route and Gas Works Link Road detailed design. This is in excess of the £275,000 contribution and the difference is expected to be recovered from the total cost of the programme.
- 18) It is recognised that this places additional pressure on the LGF and CIL funding. The funding and delivery arrangements will be subject to an agreed Memorandum of Understanding between WDC and BCC. To make up some of the local authority contribution the County Council is exploring the scope for contributions from other source, and intends for example to allocate £300,000 of it's capital maintenance programme which would otherwise likely be required over this period in the Oxford Road area, (this would not apply if works were not carried out in this area).
- 19) Within a reduced budget and higher cost estimates a number of options have been considered to bring costs into line with the budget available and these are set out in more detail below.

Options to reduce costs

- 20) It is a requirement of the Local Growth Deal that a programme of schemes be identified that can be delivered with the available funding up to April 2019. Hence work has been done to:
 - Identify cost savings as a result of minor amendments that avoid costs with limited impact on scheme design or benefits, (for example minor realignment of kerb lines to avoid statutory undertakers plant and equipment;

- Identify the potential for cost savings as a result of delivering schemes to a lower standard of finish, for example by using cheaper materials
 - Identify opportunities to reduce the scope of the overall programme based on which individual schemes offer the greatest benefits.
- a. **Cost savings as a result of minor amendments that avoid costs with little if any impact on scheme design or benefits**
- i. As far as possible at this stage in the design process the scope for minor design changes has been considered, and the potential to reduce avoidable costs and to ensure that the scheme is not over specified is reflected in the latest estimates. It may be possible to identify further savings through value engineering as design work progresses but these will not fundamentally affect what schemes can be afforded. These costs are reflected in the best cost estimate which take account of recent information on market rates (see appendix 1).
- b. **Cost savings as a result of delivering schemes to a lower standard.**
- i. An assessment of the scope to reduce costs by using cheaper materials and hence delivering schemes to a lower standard has been carried out looking at each individual scheme. This Low Cost Option, also set out in Appendix 1 indicates that the potential for cost savings is around 10% overall. Experience indicates that the cost savings from using lower quality materials are disproportionate to the impact on the functionality, durability and/or appearance of the finished scheme, with corresponding consequences for whole life costs and the achievement of benefits. Critical among these are achieving regeneration through public realm improvements and the delivery of slower traffic speeds without relying upon signals and other regulatory measures, by increasing driver awareness of and engagement with the environment and activity outside their car. The materials palette selected is essential to achieve these and has been robustly challenged to ensure it represents the lowest cost consistent with the required performance, quality, durability, and safety.
- ii. A cost conscious approach continues to be appropriate going forward to ensure that the schemes deliver value for money but this approach is not likely to achieve significant savings, and could in fact be counterproductive. Moreover the Low Cost Option does not enable the delivery of more schemes within the budget envelope available.
- c. **Identify opportunities to reduce the scope of the overall programme based on which individual schemes offer the greatest benefits.**
- i. The High Wycombe Town Centre/Southern Quadrant Major Scheme consists of eight individual schemes (counting the Gas Works Link/ Alternative Route – as one scheme although it will be delivered in stages). The discrete nature of the individual schemes that together comprise the Major Scheme means that the scope of the programme that is delivered within the remaining three year timeframe of the Local Growth Deal, can be tailored to the available funding, with scope for further delivery of schemes in subsequent years, as funding allows.
- ii. The individual schemes are:
 Gas Works Link / Alternative Route
 Oxford Road Roundabout
 Cressex Road/Cressex Link Road

Cressex Cycle Scheme
Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street
Abbey Way Gyratory
Dovecot Gyratory
Lily's Walk Junction¹

- iii. The cost estimates for these individual schemes are set out in appendix 1, with different cost estimates included as described earlier. Appendix 1 also sets out 15 different combinations of schemes that have been costed to demonstrate what options may be affordable. Based on this a shortlist of eight options is shown in the form of a Budget Comparison Chart which sets out deliverable packages of schemes prioritised according to their contribution to town centre regeneration, highway network performance and taking account of deliverability issues. Less critical and less well performing schemes are progressively removed as the options proceed from Option A (full scheme) to Option H (Gas Works Link / Alternative Route only). For comparison purposes this chart shows the cost estimates as these have developed over time since the submission of the Strategic Business Case in 2014.
- iv. The areas covered by the individual schemes are shown on the plan in appendix 2.

Benefits

- v. The OBC describes the costs and benefits associated with the implementation of the full programme of High Wycombe Town Centre /Southern Quadrant schemes. The benefits achieved from reducing the scope of the programme will clearly be less than implementation in full.
- vi. All the combinations of schemes to be delivered include the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route as providing this additional traffic capacity is a pre-requisite to being able to divert through traffic away from the town centre, and reduce road space and thereby support improvements and regeneration there. It also makes the traffic management associated with delivery of other town centre schemes easier to achieve and creates options in respect of the future of Abbey Way Flyover which is a maintenance intensive highways asset that creates strong severance in the town centre.
- vii. The two Cressex area schemes are also prioritised given the development and traffic pressures in this area. Within the available budget both of these Cressex schemes together with the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route are deliverable at an estimated cost of £9.5m. These are therefore considered the Core Schemes to be delivered as part of this programme. There is also scope to deliver another town centre scheme or schemes within budget.
- viii. Based on traffic performance and contribution to public realm improvements the changes to Abbey Way Gyratory and Dovecote Gyratory are not prioritised. The Abbey Way Gyratory scheme has the potential to contribute to consolidation and enhancement of the Swan frontage site however further work in relation to site consolidation would remain necessary even if this scheme were to be brought forward. The option for changes to Lilys Walk to

¹ Note this scheme was not included in the in the Strategic Outline Business Case 2014, although it was reconsidered for inclusion as part of the development of the OBC. It is not one of the schemes that is being recommended for implementation.

allow right turns onto Abbey Way Flyover has limited justification as other bus routing options are available.

- ix. At this stage there are considered to be the most significant benefits associated with delivery of either the Oxford Road scheme or the Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street scheme. Within the available budget it is possible to deliver either one – but not both - of these schemes in addition to the Core Schemes. These are shown in appendix 1 as Options 6 (Core Schemes plus Oxford Road Roundabout) and 7(Core Schemes plus Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street).²

Preferred Options

- x. Both Option 6 and Option 7 include the Core Schemes (Gas Works Link / Alternative Route, and Cressex Road/Cressex Link Road and Cressex Cycle Scheme). Either option would provide the following key benefits:
- Rerouting of traffic from Abbey Way Flyover and the central area enabling a reduction in the extent of highway in the central area, creating the future opportunities to:
 - make use of redundant highway space for other beneficial purposes that could include additional space for public transport, and priority parking (eg blue badge holders and short-stay parking)and creating the opportunity for remaking the river Wye (subject to technical feasibility work underway separately and to further external funding);
 - achieve a reduction in the severance effects of the Oxford Road roundabout and associated traffic, public realm improvements and creation of new public open space so as to dramatically improve the connection and – it is anticipated – the footfall between the old town and the Eden shopping centre;
 - reuse redundant highway as part of future redevelopment of Octagon Parade, subject to development proposals coming forward
 - reduce the severance effects of the Abbey Way Gyratory and associated traffic so as to improve the connection and usability of the Abbey way greenspace with the cultural quarter and with Buckinghamshire New University
 - Reduction in traffic delays and improved journey time reliability at peak times in the Southern Quadrant area.
 - Increased scope for active travel with associated health, traffic and economic benefits as a result of reduced delays to traffic
- xi. Option 6 comprising delivery of the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route, Cressex Road/Cressex Link Road, Cressex cycle scheme and Oxford Road scheme would enable some of these opportunities to be realised in the short term and so would also provide the following additional benefits compared to the Core Schemes:
- A reduction in the extent of highway in the central area, freeing the space to be used for other beneficial purposes that may include additional space for public transport, and priority parking (eg blue badge holders and short-stay parking)and creating the opportunity to remaking the river Wye (subject to technical feasibility work underway separately and to further external funding);
 - A reduction in the severance effects of the Oxford Road roundabout and associated traffic, public realm improvements and creation of new public open space so as to

² Note: Option 6 is the same as option F in the Budget Comparison Chart.

dramatically improve the connection and – it is anticipated – the footfall between the old town and the Eden shopping centre;

- Public realm improvements at Archway that could facilitate enhanced bus and taxi interchange in a way that could support the regeneration of Frogmoor
- Replacement of the traffic signals at Bellfield Rd with a non signalised junction with traffic flow and public realm benefits

xii. A further sub-option would entail the delivery of option 6 alongside work to remake the river Wye along the A40 Oxford Road. Initial technical assessment indicates scope for cost savings and avoidance of disruption if the two were constructed together. This option will be the subject of separately funded design and assessment work to confirm costs and technical feasibility (in parallel with detailed design of the HWTC/SQ schemes, and would be dependant on the identification of separate funding). The programme at Appendix 4 shows that if it were possible to secure funding, and subject to no overriding technical constraints being uncovered, that this would have only a marginal impact on the timetable for construction, and that it would be achievable by 31 March 2019.

xiii. Option 7 comprising delivery of the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route, Cressex Road/Cressex Link Road, Cressex cycle scheme and Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street scheme would also provide the following additional benefits compared to the Core Schemes:

- Restoring two way traffic in Queen Victoria Road and Easton Street would enable more direct and intuitive movement patterns through the town.
- The risk arising from runaway vehicles in the event of brake failure travelling down Crendon Street would be reduced compared to present as there could be an option for vehicles to carry on down Queen Victoria Road (at present there is no southbound lane for traffic)
- Journey times for all road users would be reduced as the result of being able to take more direct routes (avoiding the current one-way system)
- Journey times for bus passengers would be reduced as buses could travel directly from Easton St into the High Street.
- Improved visibility of the High Street as a result of traffic approaching from Easton Street
- Improved public realm in the historic town centre
- Opportunities to make better use of kerb spaces to improve and support the viability of the eastern end of the High Street.

Appraisal Summary Table showing Scheme Impacts for Major Scheme and Options 6 and 7.

xiv. In order to more comprehensively assess the wider benefits and scheme impacts of both options 6 and 7, these have been assessed using the format of the Appraisal Summary Table. These are set out alongside the impacts associated with the Major Scheme in full (with the scores taken from the OBC assessment). More detail is provided in Appendix 5, Appraisal Summary Table Worksheet.

xv. This summary table indicates that both options score better in some respects associated with journey time savings and reliability accruing to users, as some schemes that impose restrictions on traffic movements are excluded from these options. This is particularly true of option 7 which imposes least restraint on traffic routing. Correspondingly however both options score less well in relation to regeneration benefits. In terms of townscape and journey quality option 6 scores more strongly than option 7, given that this scheme includes changes in the area around Eden which are busy with both vehicles and pedestrians. It is

striking that no options are scored higher than having a neutral impact on the water environment although option 6 creates the potential to restore or remake a stretch of the river Wye along Oxford Road.

- xvi. This summary of impacts supports the view that significant benefits arise from implementation of either option 6 or 7.

Appraisal Summary Table showing Scheme Impacts for Major Scheme and Options 6 and 7

	Impacts	Assessment Criteria	Full Scheme	Option 6	Option 7
Economy	Business users & transport providers	Impact on journey time and cost	-1	-1	Neutral
	Reliability impact on Business users	Impact on number of incidents and day to day variability in journey times or average minutes of lateness.	Neutral	+1	+1
	Regeneration	Impacts on a designated regeneration area	+2	+1	+1
	Wider Impacts	Wider economic impacts	-1	+1	+1
Environmental	Noise	Noise Impact	-1	-1	-1
	Air Quality	Effects on AQMAs - Impacts on local air quality	-1	-1	-1
	Greenhouse	Change in CO2 emissions	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
	Landscape	Impact on open countryside	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Townscape	Impact on built-up areas	+1	+1	Neutral
	Historic Environment	Impact on designated sites	+1	Neutral	+1
	Biodiversity	Impact on biodiversity	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Water	Impact on drainage	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Social	Commuting & Other users	Impact on journey time and cost	-1	-1	Neutral
	Reliability impact on Commuting / Other	Impact on number of incidents and day to day variability in journey times or average minutes of lateness.	Neutral	Neutral	+1
	Physical activity	Impacts on levels of walking and cycling	+1	+1	+1
	Journey quality	Impacts on journey experience	+1	+1	Neutral
	Accidents	Change in number and severity of transport-related collisions	+1	+1	+1
	Security	Impact on security risk	+1	+1	+1
	Access to services	Change in ease of access to key locations	+1	+1	+1
	Affordability	Affordability impacts of the transport system to users	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Severance	Effects on movement by non-motorised modes	+2	+1	+1
	Option and non-use values	Introduction of new transport options	N/A	N/A	N/A

For the purposes of this table a 'large' impact is categorised with a +/-2, and a 'moderate' or 'slight' impact is categorised with a +/-1.

Delivery

- 21) Both option 6 and option 7 include the core schemes that comprise delivery of the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route, Cressex Road/Cressex Link Road, and the Cressex cycle scheme.
- 22) Further detailed design work will be undertaken prior to a decision on whether to progress the Oxford road Roundabout scheme (Option 6) or Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street (Option 7).
- 23) Either option is affordable within the available budget. The programmes for delivery of these options are set out as appendix 4. Either option is deliverable within the three years remaining of the Local Growth deal.
- 24) Wycombe District Council which, through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), is the main local funder of the schemes remains committed to the delivery of the Masterplan in full as it forms a key part of the Delivery and Site Allocations Development Plan Document - part of its corporate policy - recognising that scheme delivery may continue past 2019 outside the framework of the current Local Growth Deal, but possibly subject to further bids for external funding. In this context whilst the programme benefits may not be achieved in full by 2019 there is potential for these to be achieved over a longer period.

Risks

- 25) The risks set out in the risk register, appendix E of the OBC remain current. As the programmes for the options in Appendix 4 demonstrate, whilst the scope of the Major Scheme is reduced, the timetable for delivery remains a challenge. The programmes set out in Appendix 3 are predicated on the option of extending the contract with Marlborough Surfacing Ltd, who constructed Westbourne St, to carry on construction of the Alternative Route. It is estimated that alternative procurement options, either via a framework or a restricted tender, would add approximately one and two months respectively.
- 26) Work is ongoing on a number of issues, including the need to confirm whether or not any further planning permissions are required for highway works either because cumulative environmental impacts could mean that a requirement for planning permission arises for works that would normally be considered permitted development, or because the outcome of ongoing modelling may suggest changes to the configuration of the junction at the south end of the Gas Works link. If any further planning permission is required, this may significantly impact on the programme delivery. The Wycombe Implementation Board will be kept updated on this and on other key project issues.
- 27) In the long term the aspiration remains to remove Abbey Way Flyover. In parallel with the delivery of either Option 6 or Option 7 the development of the OBC has highlighted the value of carrying out further modelling to ensure that the design of the Alternative Route and associated schemes take account of this in case it were to occur so as to avoid or minimise any future abortive costs. This work will be carried on in parallel with delivery of the programme and any refinements to the design incorporated as appropriate.

Conclusion and Next Steps

- 28) Taking account of the assessment undertaken as part of the full OBC and the further consideration as set out in the revised Appraisal Summary Table above, the wider benefits of either Option 6 or Option 7 are considered to remain sufficiently positive so as to justify the release of funds from both the Local Enterprise partnership and the District Council to enable the High Wycombe Town Centre/ Southern Quadrant schemes within the Local Growth Deal to proceed. A decision on which option - either 6 or 7 - should proceed will be taken by the two Councils in consultation with the Local Enterprise Partnership by December 2017. In the same timescale, if option 6 is preferred, and subject to the caveats mentioned earlier then a decision will also be taken on whether to proceed with remaking a section of the River Wye along Oxford Road alongside the highway works.
- 29) Prior to commissioning contractors to construct the next phase of the Gas Works Link/ Alternative Route the Project Initiation Documentation (PID) will be approved by the Wycombe Implementation Board. In parallel discussions are continuing with the landowner and developer *Inland Homes* to enable the construction of the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route. Construction will be preceded by public consultation on the detailed design of the Gas Works Link / Alternative Route, with construction of the next stage of the Alternative route scheduled to begin by the summer 2016.

John Callaghan WDC 04/5/2016

List of Appendices

- Appendix 1 HWTCMPSQ Masterplan Budget Comparisons March 2016 (sets out scheme costs and budget options)
- Appendix 2 Plan of schemes
- Appendix 3 Programmes for delivery of schemes in Option 6 and Option 7.
- Appendix 4 Appraisal Summary table worksheet for Options 6 and 7.