

1. The Strategic Case for the Bypass

The Cheshire East Council primary objective in developing the Middlewich Eastern Bypass is stated simply as:

‘To deliver a highway scheme which functions as a proper bypass to deliver the traffic solution for Middlewich’

Implicit within the primary objective are considerations relating to:

- The quality of the bypass alignment and route standard
- Alleviation of traffic congestion on the local highway network
- Alleviation of road safety concerns on the local highway network
- Impacts on non-peak journeys in terms of distance travelled and time taken

A 3 stage assessment of options will be undertaken based upon Strategic Objective, Subsidiary Objectives, and affordability:

1. Fulfilling the requirements of the primary objective will be the first filter in the assessment of options and options which meet the objective will be assessed further against the other key requirements.
2. Ranking of suitable options will be undertaken against a series of key requirements that have been identified for the bypass to satisfy (see below).
3. Cost: Affordability of the bypass, considering issues relating to cost, increased development opportunity and land values, and potential contributions to the cost of the scheme will influence further funding requirements (LEP / DfT etc) and is fundamental to the deliverability of the scheme.

2. Key Requirements to be fulfilled by the Bypass

In addition to functioning as a bypass, the scheme will need to deliver positive outcomes with respect to 10 key requirements that have been identified through internal consultations within Cheshire East Council. The options will be assessed and ranked comparatively against these requirements.

The requirements are listed below with additional narrative to give context:

Fulfilling delivery of the Local Plan

The bypass needs to be capable of enabling the delivery of the Local Plan with particular emphasis on the creation of employment through development of Midpoint 18 and other strategic sites, and housing commitments to support growth of the area.

Delivery of further development opportunities

It is desirable for the bypass to be capable of delivering or enabling development opportunities beyond those contained in the local plan thereby providing longer term benefits to Middlewich. Key stakeholder inputs from Pochin / DB Symmetry / MPIL will be included in the ranking of options against this requirement.

Facilitation of High Growth City objectives associated with HS2 (Northern Gateway)

High Growth City objectives associated with HS2 include the Northern Gateway which requires improved highway access to Crewe from M6 J18 to the north. The bypass options will be assessed and ranked based upon their potential to be a key component of the Northern Gateway.

Facilitation of an east to west bypass (future strategic highway development)

Whilst an east – west route is not current Council Policy, a more direct route from M6 J18 to Winsford Middlewich Road in the future may be desirable or even essential. The bypass route should preferably facilitate, and in any event not hinder the future development of a strategic east-west link providing improved linkage between M6 J18 and Winsford. Future-proofing opportunities associated with the options will be considered.

Connectivity with Cledford Lane

Cledford Lane provides access to a number of properties to the east and west of the bypass, and whilst minor and non-strategic in nature, the potential for connectivity in each direction between the bypass and Cledford Lane will be assessed.

Delivery of a new railway station site for Middlewich

A new railway station for Middlewich anticipated either within Midpoint 18 or in the Brooks Lane regeneration area will require highway access and the bypass shall be capable of delivering a suitable standard of access taking into consideration demands for park and ride and linkage for other modes of transport.

Facilitating further rail opportunities

Further rail opportunities associated with the chord line running from Sandbach to Northwich on the boundary of the Midpoint 18 site, associated with HS2 facilities (freight services relocation from Crewe), rail based manufacturing, and multi-modal facilities development will be considered by virtue of the ability of the bypass to support any or all opportunities. The potential for effective highway linkage to the bypass is an essential enabler for rail based development opportunities.

Speed of delivery

Speed of delivery of the scheme will be of fundamental importance in relieving traffic congestion, alleviating road safety concerns and generating the benefits for Middlewich and Cheshire East associated with the Local Plan. Options will be ranked based upon the scale and complexity of works required and anticipated time for implementation.

Environmental impacts

Environmental impacts may vary significantly between the route options and will form a consideration in the overall evaluation of options.

Cumulative impacts from habitats & species (including a nationally-significant population of lesser silver diving beetles) may potentially rule out some options. Those options which do not appear to be at risk of such cumulative impact will be assessed by species / habitat based upon: Population; Level of Protection (statutory); and Impact of the scheme on the resource.

Environmental ranking will be provisional at this stage (consistent with scoping) as ecology surveys are incomplete and EIA works will be undertaken in the next phase.

Cost and effectiveness of environmental mitigation

Closely linked to environmental impacts are the mitigation works required and their cost effectiveness. Key determinants to be considered include:

- Number of watercourse crossings and adjacencies of the options to the watercourses

- Number of ponds impacted and degree of severance of species communities by the options
- Hedgerow impacts based upon measurement of hedgerows lost and potential significance

3. Weighting of Requirements

The following priorities and weighting factors have been determined for the above requirements:

Item	Requirement	Priority	Weighting
1	Fulfilling the delivery of the Local Plan	1	9
2	Delivery of further development opportunities	4	6
3	Facilitation of high growth city HS2 objectives (Northern Gateway)	2	8
4	Facilitation of an east-west by-pass (strategic future proofing)	4	6
5	Connectivity with Cledford Lane	8	2
6	Delivery of a new railway station site	4	6
7	Facilitating rail opportunities	4	6
8	Speed of delivery	5	5
9	Environmental impacts	7	3
10	Cost effectiveness of environmental mitigations.	7	3