

Cheshire East Council

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	9 th May 2017
Report of:	Executive Director of Place
Subject/Title:	A500 Dualling
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr David Brown, Infrastructure and Highways

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The A500 is a former national trunk road and a key route which connects Crewe and Nantwich to the M6 at Junction 16 and to Stoke and Staffordshire. The section of the A500 between Junction 16 and the junction with the A531 and B5472 at Mere Moss Roundabout is single carriageway and is the only section of the A500 corridor that isn't built to dual carriageway standard.
- 1.2. It has been a long held ambition to dual this section of road to improve connectivity and road safety and more recently the proposed A500 Dualling Scheme has become a key component of the Council's economic strategy to enable job creation, the delivery of allocated housing sites and improve traffic flow.
- 1.3. The proposal will improve access from the M6 to a number of development and employment sites in Crewe that have been identified in the Local Plan Strategy. Furthermore, it is a key infrastructure component in supporting the emerging ambitions of the Constellation Partnership centred on the delivery of a HS2 Hub Station at Crewe. The scheme will also be able to accommodate construction traffic which will need to access the HS2 Phase 2a line of route south of Crewe and the proposed Crewe Hub station.
- 1.4. The Council was successful in its bid for £2m from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Large Local Major scheme fund to develop the scheme to Outline Business Case stage which is the next step in securing funding to deliver the scheme. It was one of only 12 schemes nationally that were successful in this round of bidding.
- 1.5. This report highlights the findings of the recent informal stakeholder consultation, recommends a preferred option for the A500 and seeks approval to undertake the further work necessary to submit a planning application for the scheme and to develop the Outline Business Case.

2. Recommendation

2.1. Cabinet is asked to:

- a) Approve the following Scheme Objectives;
 - To support the economic, physical and social regeneration of Crewe
 - To improve road safety and journey times and their reliability
 - To improve the reliability of public transport
 - To improve connectivity between important economic centres in the sub-regional Constellation Partnership
 - To support delivery of key national infrastructure, e.g. HS2 and the Crewe Hub Station
 - To support delivery of key employment and housing allocations
 - To improve the efficiency and reliability of the highway network
 - To reduce the conflict between the local and strategic traffic, and provide an improved route for freight and business travel
 - To facilitate future improvements to Junction 16 on the M6
- b) Authorise the Head of Strategic Infrastructure to adopt Option 2 (as described in paragraph 5.1) as the preferred solution to meet the scheme objectives.
- c) Authorise the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Highways and Infrastructure Portfolio Holder to further develop the preferred Option 2 to enable the preparation of a planning application and the Outline Business Case and to submit the Outline Business Case to the Department of Transport
- d) Authorise the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Highways and Infrastructure Portfolio Holder to make and issue the statutory notices to enter land for survey purposes associated with the proposed new road as required via S289-290 of the Highways Act 1980 and associated powers.
- e) Note that the Scheme Cost Estimate currently stands at £57m (including risk), and that it will continue to be refined as the design is developed further.
- f) Note the summary of consultations undertaken with key stakeholders on the options, which is included in the Scheme Assessment Report
- g) Approve the anticipated programme for the next stage of work.

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. The project team and other selected stakeholders held a workshop to generate a list of potential improvement schemes that could alleviate the defined problems and meet the Scheme Objectives, either fully or in part.

A list of 20 schemes was generated that included on-line improvements, off-line improvements, public transport, demand management, and traffic management initiatives.

- 3.2. Following the workshop, the potential schemes were compared using the Department for Transport's Early Assessment and Sifting Tool (EAST), and then the best options taken forward for a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis. This reduced the options down, and identified the dualling option as the preferred option. An option to implement localised improvements at Meremoor Moss Roundabout also performed well in the assessments, and will therefore be included in the Outline Business Case as a lower cost option for comparison purposes.
- 3.3. A Scheme Assessment Report (SAR) has been undertaken to consider three variations on the preferred dualling option. Option 1 is to provide a new carriageway parallel to the north of the existing to create a dual carriageway; Option 2 provides a new carriageway to the south, and; Option 3 provides a new carriageway that alternates between the north and south to avoid constraints. The options were assessed in terms of their engineering and environmental advantages, disadvantages and constraints.
- 3.4. The SAR found that Option 3 was clearly the least preferred option, and so was discounted. It also found that the decision between Options 1 and 2 was finely balanced, and recommended that both options were taken forward for consultation with selected stakeholders, to gauge opinion on whether one of the options is supported over the other. The results of the consultation are described in the section below.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1. The A500 is a key strategic route in Cheshire which provides the main route from the south of Crewe, the future High Speed 2 (HS2) hub station and Nantwich to the M6 (junction 16). The area currently suffers from congestion issues and the implementation of the scheme is vital to ensure that future growth aspirations can be met.
- 4.2. To prepare for future growth plans in Crewe a number of highway capacity upgrades have recently been implemented along the A500 corridor between Crewe and the M6. These upgrades include:
 - A Highways England pinch point scheme to improve capacity at Junction 16 of the M6;
 - The recent completion of the A5020 link road which provides access from the A500 to the southeast of Crewe; and
 - The recent completion of the B5071 Basford West Spine Road which provides access from the A500 to the southwest of Crewe.
- 4.3. The remaining sections of the A500 corridor between Crewe and the M6 are of dual carriageway standard and the proposed scheme would

therefore remove the final pinch point along the corridor and complete the highway capacity upgrades in the area, providing the capacity needed to accommodate future growth. The scheme would also future proof the link against any possible future investment by Highways England at M6 J16. As well as growth within Crewe, the A500 will also serve as the main route from the proposed HS2 hub station at Crewe (which would also be accessed from the A500) to the M6 and the wider region.

- 4.4. The Council's Local Plan Strategy includes a series of ambitious targets for growth in housing and employment around Crewe and Nantwich, which would be supported by improved links to the motorway network. The scheme would also support the growth strategy for the Constellation Partnership.
- 4.5. The scheme would also support development sites in Crewe, including the Basford East and West sites which will be situated adjacent to the proposed HS2 station hub. These sites are described in the Cheshire and Warrington Strategic Economic Plan as "one of the UK's prime development opportunities over the next 20 years being located at the heart of the UK's economic geography" and represent a huge opportunity for a landmark development in Crewe.
- 4.6. Should the scheme not be completed, the A500 will continue to be a congestion constraint for traffic travelling between the south of Crewe and the M6 and the wider Cheshire East, Stoke and Staffordshire region. This would thus hinder the future development plans in the area including the Constellation Partnership and the Cheshire East Local Plan growth targets.
- 4.7. The future HS2 line will include a hub station in Crewe which is expected to open in 2027. During the construction of the HS2 line and the hub station it is expected that a significant number of HGV movements will use the A500 to travel between the M6 and the HS2 construction access point. This additional traffic is expected to exacerbate the existing congestion issues experienced along the link, increasing delay. This would be alleviated through the scheme which would provide dual carriageway along this section of the A500, allowing cars and other vehicles to safely overtake construction traffic.

5. Background

- 5.1. Three different options have been considered for widening the existing A500 to a dual carriageway; adding a new carriageway to the north of the existing (Option 1); adding a new carriageway to the south of the existing (Option 2), and; adding a new carriageway that alternates between the north and south to avoid constraints (Option 3).
- 5.2. The three options have been assessed against engineering and environmental factors, as reported in the Scheme Assessment Report (Appendix B (available on agenda website)). The report concluded that Option 3, to alternate the dualling between the north and south should be

discounted, because of the significant impact it would have on traffic flows during construction, the environmental impact that would be caused by removing banks of trees on both sides of the A500, the impact on existing structures beneath the road, and a greater cost.

- 5.3. It was concluded that the preferred option is to widen to the south, because it would have the least impact on statutory undertaker's equipment, the least impact on the recently constructed infrastructure associated with the M6 J16 Pinch Point scheme, and have a lesser impact on ecology, including avoiding the pond known locally as 'the duckaries', which would also have presented a significant construction challenge. For full details see the Scheme Assessment Report (Appendix B).
- 5.4. The choice between widening to the north and south was a finely balanced decision, and so both options were taken to consultations with key stakeholders. This included consultations with landowners and tenants that have land on both sides of the A500, Barthomley and Weston & Basford Parish Councils, environmental specialists, and Highways England. The consultation exercise confirmed that the preferred option is to widen to the south.
- 5.5. The A500 between M6 J16 and Meremoor Moss Roundabout was constructed in the mid-1980s but developments in eastern Crewe and the construction of the A500 Hough Shavington Bypass immediately to the west (opened to traffic in 2003) have generated a significant increase in traffic flows, causing congestion. The proposed developments included in the Local Plan and expected as a result of the new HS2 hub station will generate more traffic and exacerbate problems on the link.
- 5.6. A study was undertaken in 2014, 'A500 Dualling and Widening – Preliminary Cost Study Report', which considered three design options and provided a cost estimate for each.
- 5.7. In April 2016, a Scheme Assessment Report was issued and concluded that all three options were viable and deliverable from an engineering perspective. In March 2017 it was updated to include a summary of the consultations undertaken with selected stakeholders on the options. As described in the section above, the report concluded that 'Option 2 – Widening to the South' was the preferred option.
- 5.8. In July 2016 an application was made to the Department for Transport for Scheme Development Costs, for preparation of a planning application and business case. In November 2016, it was announced that the bid was successful.
- 5.9. In December 2016, a consultation exercise with selected stakeholders started to gauge opinion on which option was preferred. These consultations are reported in the Scheme Assessment Report (Appendix C (available on agenda website)).

- 5.10. The planning application is scheduled to be submitted in April 2018, and the business case in May 2018. If successful, the intended programme is for construction to begin in Spring 2019, and be completed by Summer 2021.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. Barthomley
- 6.2. Weston and Basford

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- a) The need for the scheme is clearly established in the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, identifying from the outset the need to improve transport connections to deliver the Plan, including the proposed scheme on the A500.

By providing additional highway capacity to cater for additional traffic from development, the scheme would support the establishment of the Local Plan Strategy and the Northern Gateway Development Zone. The scheme is thus considered to be in line with local policy and essential for the delivery of the future economic growth plans of Cheshire East.

7.2. Legal Implications

- a) The Council is the local highway authority and has a duty to maintain the highway network and related infrastructure. The proposed scheme will improve the capacity and safety of the highway network.
- b) If the scheme results in necessity to compulsorily purchase the land required for the scheme, the Council have powers under the Highways Act to make an Order, however this will be raised in a future report to members at the appropriate stage of the project.

7.3. Financial Implications

- a) The approved capital allocation for the A500 dualling scheme is £2.468m as reported in the Medium Term Financial Strategy at Full Council on the 23rd February 2017.
- b) Of this, the Council's contribution is £0.5m. The majority of this £0.5m has been spent in prior years in preparing the successful bid to the Department for Transport's (DfT) Large Local Major scheme fund to develop the scheme to Outline Business Case.
- c) The balance of £1.968m is therefore funded by the Department of Transport grant which was obtained as a result of the successful bid.

- d) The current budget allocation is sufficient to complete and submit the Outline Business Case to the Department for Transport and the subsequent recommendation to commence the planning application process.

7.4. Equality Implications

- a) The Scheme Assessment Report has considered impacts on all types of traveller, and on private and community assets. The business case submission will expand on the scheme's impact on equality.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

- a) As the scheme is a widening of an existing road, it will not introduce any new severance of existing farms or communities. There are some existing field gates that access directly on to the A500, and it is likely that these will have to be closed once the road becomes a dual carriageway. However, the farm tenants have said that they no longer use the gates because of the high volume of traffic on the A500. Appropriate alternative accesses will be provided, as required, as part of the scheme.
- b) There may be some impact during the construction phase, because the two bridges over the A500 will need to be demolished and replaced. Consideration will be given to how connectivity can be maintained during construction, and the use of temporary bridges is an option.

7.6. Human Resources Implications

- a) None

7.7. Public Health Implications

- a) The Environmental Statement will include an assessment of the impacts on air quality and noise levels as a result of the scheme, and include appropriate mitigation measures. It is thought that the impacts will be relatively small, given that there is already a road along the route, and there are relatively few receptors.
- b) There are a number of existing at-grade uncontrolled pedestrian crossings over the A500. It would be unacceptable to leave this type of crossing over a dual carriageway, on safety grounds. The approach to dealing with these will be dealt with as part of the scheme.

7.8. Implications for Children and Young People

- a) None

7.9. Other Implications (Please Specify)

- a) None

8. Risk Management

- 8.1. The programme is a risk. There are significant benefits of opening the road widening before construction of the proposed HS2 hub station in Crewe begins, because HS2 construction traffic will use the A500 as an access route. HS2 construction is currently programmed to begin in 2021. However, if there is a delay in the A500 scheme, then construction of the road widening could take place at the same time as construction traffic is accessing the HS2 site.
- 8.2. The majority of land that would be required to widen the A500 is owned by the Duchy of Lancaster. The land cannot be subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order, and would therefore have to be acquired via agreement. The Duchy have said that they are supportive of the scheme.
- 8.3. There are some significant services that cross the scheme, such as a Mainline Fuels oil pipeline, and high pressure gas mains. A conservative estimate of the costs associated with their diversion or protection has been included in the overall Scheme Cost Estimate, but further work is required to confirm those estimates, and to understand the requirements of the utility companies.

9. Access to Information/Bibliography

- 9.1. The background papers relating to this report are available in electronic format on the Council's web site (Cabinet agenda page) and will be available for inspection in hard copy at the meeting.

Appendix A – DfT Large Local Major Transport Schemes Bid

Appendix B – Scheme Assessment Report, with Addendum

Appendix C – Output from Early Assessment and Sifting tool

10. Contact Information

Contact details for this report are as follows:

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