

REPORT TO: Cabinet

20 April 2017

LEAD OFFICER: Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development

A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Route Options Consultation

Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is to agree the Council's response to Highways England's consultation on route options for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement scheme.
2. This is not a key decision because it is responding to a consultation. It was first published in the February 2017 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees:
 - a) the response to the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvement Scheme set out in paragraph 28;
 - b) delegated authority be given to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development to make further technical comments in consultation with the Strategic Planning Portfolio Holder.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. Improvements to the A428 are important for the delivery of the growth agenda, the economy, and to improve journey times and road safety for the travelling public. The road has an impact on the environment and economy of the district, therefore it is recommended that the Council responds to the consultation addressing potential route options.

Executive Summary

5. The proposed upgrading of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet is the final section of upgrading the route to dual carriageway standard between the M1 and M11. In the longer term it will form part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.
6. The current Highways England public consultation is the first key stage in developing the A428 improvement scheme; it includes three route options, and three junction options for the Black Cat roundabout at the A1. The consultation does not include junction design for the Caxton Gibbet roundabout.
7. Feedback to this consultation will inform more detailed technical work by Highways England leading to a Preferred Route announcement, anticipated in Summer 2018. As a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project a Development Consent Order process will be undertaken and consent ultimately granted by Central Government. Delivery of the scheme would be likely to take place as part of the Road Investment Strategy Period 2 (from April 2020).

Background

8. The Case for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway was prepared by a coalition of local authorities between Oxford and Cambridge in 2015 to lobby for infrastructure improvements between the cities; the report set out the high level context of the strategic and economic need for the construction of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, with an immediate focus on delivering the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet upgrade.
9. In the November 2016 Autumn Statement the Government welcomed the National Infrastructure Commission's interim report into the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford growth corridor and accepted the recommendation for an Oxford-Cambridge Expressway, and committed £27 million in development funding.
10. Government is also committed to improving other infrastructure in the region; the A1 East of England Strategic Study (looking at improving the A1 between the M25 and Peterborough) and East-West Rail (with funding committed in the Autumn Statement 2016 to the Bedford to Cambridge section).
11. Over £2 billion is committed in the current Road Investment Strategy (RIS) to create better and safer journeys and support growth across the East of England. This includes the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme, now under construction, and an upgrade to the A428 between the A1 Black Cat roundabout and A1198 Caxton Gibbet roundabout, as the first phase of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. The RIS announcement: *"improvement of the A428 near St Neots, linking the A421 to Milton Keynes with the existing dual carriageway section of the A428 to Cambridge, creating an Expressway standard link between the two cities via Bedford. The scheme is expected to include significant improvements to the Black Cat roundabout, where the A1 currently meets the A421."*
12. Highways England's Route Options consultation is the first key stage in developing the A428 improvement scheme. Following the feedback from all parties to this consultation Highways England will undertake technical analysis which will determine which is the most suitable option to take forward, together with a proposal for the Black Cat roundabout. This will then result in an announcement of a 'Preferred Route' for the scheme (anticipated in Summer 2018). A Development Consent Order (DCO) submission will be made to the Planning Inspectorate and, subject to DCO consent for the scheme and funding being approved by Central Government, it is anticipated that delivery would likely take place as part of RIS2 from April 2020.
13. There is limited technical information available at this stage for the route options consultation. Highways England has prepared a short consultation brochure; this outlines the three route options as indicative lines on a map and three options for the improved Black Cat junction, together with a brief comparison of the options. The brochure and a questionnaire response form is available to view on Highways England's A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet webpage:
<http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/a428-black-cat-to-caxton-gibbet/>

Options for consultation

14. Highways England has identified six key benefits and objectives in developing the scheme, as follows:
 - Enabling economic growth
 - A safe and serviceable network

- A more free-flowing network
 - An improved environment
 - A more accessible and integrated network
 - Customer satisfaction
15. Highways England has sifted a long list of over 40 potential options, including improvements to public transport and junctions, widening the existing A428, and building new road infrastructure away from the current A428, to see which performed best against these objectives.
16. Highways England is currently consulting on three route options to provide a new dual 2-lane carriageway between the Black Cat roundabout at the A1 and Caxton Gibbet at the A1198. All options propose grade-separated junctions at both ends and would downgrade the existing road for local access. The three routes are shown at Appendix 1. (It is important to note that at present they are indicative lines on a plan in order to give an indication of approximate alignments):
- **Orange Route** – Located to the north of the existing A428 from the Caxton Gibbet towards a new junction with Cambridge Road, St Neots, where the route switches to the south of the existing A428 towards the Black Cat junction with the A1.
 - **Purple Route** – From the Caxton Gibbet the alignment is situated to the south of Eltisley and Croxton, but north of Abbotsley (in Huntingdonshire district) to Black Cat.*
 - **Pink Route** – Initially follows the same alignment as the Purple route from the Caxton Gibbet to the south of Eltisley and Croxton, but then continues south of Abbotsley to Black Cat.*
- (* Neither the Purple or Pink Routes provide direct access to St Neots from the new A428; access would be via the downgraded existing road.)
17. In addition, Highway England is consulting on three options for the improvement of the Black Cat roundabout as follows (The three junction options are shown at Appendix 1):
- **Option A** – Free flowing access from the A421 to the upgraded A428 and onto the A1 northbound. Free flowing movements along the A1. Two new roundabouts to the west of the current roundabout would facilitate all the local road traffic movements. To achieve this layout the junction would be at 3 height levels.
 - **Option B** – Free flowing access from the A421 onto the upgraded A428 and onto the A1 northbound as with Option A. However the A1 would not be free flowing, and would need to continue to negotiate the existing Black Cat roundabout. Also, not all directions can be achieved via this arrangement. This junction would be two height levels.
 - **Option C** – Similar to Option A with free flowing access from the A421 to the upgraded A428 and onto the A1 northbound, and free flowing movements along the A1. The difference between Options A and C relate to the local road movements, which are accommodated by a single enlarged roundabout compared to two roundabouts. This layout would also be at 3 height levels.
18. Highways England has not, at this stage, provided any options for the design of the junction layout at the Caxton Gibbet roundabout. It is a much simpler junction to

address than the Black Cat roundabout and Highways England anticipates it could be a grade separated arrangement similar to the Cambourne junction.

Implications for South Cambridgeshire

19. Only the eastern extent of the road improvement scheme lies within South Cambridgeshire; between the Caxton Gibbet roundabout westwards to the district boundary to the west of Croxton village.
20. In relation to the improvement scheme that lies within South Cambridgeshire the consultation material shows all route options would:
 - have a visual impact at the Caxton Gibbet, where a new grade separated junction arrangement will be needed to enable free-flowing traffic along the A428,
 - remove traffic from the existing road, help to shift traffic away from local roads by encouraging drivers to use the dual carriageway, but may lead to more traffic on the A1198 to access the route at the Caxton Gibbet (Note: this should be viewed within the context of the A14 improvement scheme being completed by the time works begin on the A428, which should draw back traffic from surrounding routes including the A1198),
 - improve air quality along the current A428, and
 - provide opportunities for improving access for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians along the existing A428 which will be retained as a local road.
21. From the limited information provided in the consultation material the route options would have the following impacts on South Cambridgeshire:
 - **Landscape** – The Purple and Pink Routes cut through an attractive, tranquil undulating and more detailed landscape, which is some of the best landscape in the district. Both routes will be closer to and impact on several villages, and will require more infrastructure in the form of six additional road crossings within the rural area.

In contrast, the majority of the Orange Route lies within an established transport corridor and would have a lesser impact on a more regular and intensive agricultural landscape. The route crosses four local roads, three of which are close to the existing A428. The Purple and Pink Routes would have a significantly greater impact on landscape than the Orange Route.
 - **Ecology** – There are sites designated for ecological protection to the south of the existing A428; including Eltisley Wood, Croxton Park and Caxton Moats County Wildlife Sites. Both the Purple and Pink Routes pass close to Gransden Wood SSSI, whilst the Pink Route also passes close to Weaverly Wood SSSI and through several woodlands including St John's Wood and Thistle Hill Plantation. Therefore the Purple and Pink Routes would likely have a greater impact on ecology than the Orange Route.
 - **Heritage assets** – More heritage assets would be impacted by the Purple and Pink Routes to the south; which would bring the route closer to the Scheduled Ancient Monument and the Listed Dovecote at Pastures Farm (surrounding it with A roads on three sides) and four moated sites, including a Schedule Ancient Monument at Caxton Moats. It is likely that these routes would also cut across a historic route linking Eltisley and Caxton

Conservation Areas. Just outside South Cambridgeshire the routes also pass close to further listed buildings. The Purple and Pink Routes would cause harm to South Cambridgeshire's historic environment.

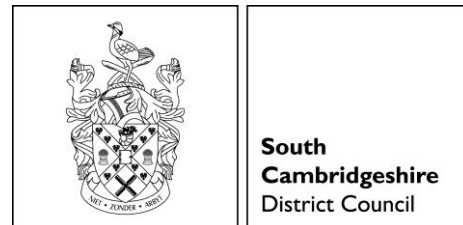
On the other hand the Orange Route would take traffic away from Eltisley Conservation Area within which are numerous listed buildings including a mile stone and mile post adjacent to the existing A428. It would also take traffic away from Croxton Conservation Area and listed buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monument and Registered Park and Garden. The Orange Route would have a neutral or positive impact on South Cambridgeshire's historic environment.

- **Air quality and noise impacts** – The prevailing wind direction is from the south west, which would suggest properties in Eltisley and Croxton could potentially be more directly affected by the (Purple and Pink) routes which align to the south. Both villages should benefit from the Orange Route which would take traffic further north than the existing road; and with careful selection of the final route alignment within the corridor, it may be possible that adverse impacts could be mitigated.
22. In addition, the Orange Route will provide a high speed connection directly to St Neots which neither of the other two routes offer, although it will still be possible to reach St Neots on the existing A428 which will be retained for local access. It would also provide greater resilience in the A428 corridor to cope with unexpected incidents and events on either the upgraded A428 or the downgraded local road.
 23. Highways England has yet to provide details for the design of the Caxton Gibbet roundabout. However, the Council will want to ensure any future design for this junction minimises impacts on the existing businesses near the junction and future residential-led development at Cambourne West.
 24. A new cycleway is also being explored between Papworth Everard and the Caxton Gibbet roundabout. It is important that the scheme does not prejudice the delivery of new non-motorised user infrastructure in the vicinity of the A428 corridor and it should seek to reduce severance caused by the current road, by facilitating appropriate access across it.
 25. It is also important to take into consideration City Deal proposals for the A428 corridor, to ensure these would not be prejudiced by the A428 improvement scheme, and should aim to achieve synergies. The first phase of City Deal will consider the A428 from Cambridge as far as the Caxton Gibbet roundabout, but future phases will address the wider corridor to St Neots.

Proposed Response to the Route Options Consultation

26. There will inevitably be some environmental and social impact from a major new road scheme. However, as outlined above (paragraphs 21-22), the Orange Route would appear to provide the best alignment for South Cambridgeshire; in terms of minimising harm and safeguarding the quality of life of local residents.
27. Whilst the Black Cat junction is not within South Cambridgeshire it is nevertheless an important junction on strategic routes serving the region. To be effective the junction layout must facilitate free flowing movements on all strategic routes. In this context, Option B would appear a weaker option than A and C, as traffic using the A1 would still have to negotiate the Black Cat roundabout and it prevents north bound A1 traffic

from joining the new A428 towards Caxton Gibbet, forcing traffic to remain the existing road thus reducing the potential benefits to South Cambridgeshire residents living adjacent to it.



28. Cabinet is recommended to agree the following response to Highways England:

1. Support the principle of upgrading the A428 between the Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet which will support the delivery of the national, regional and local growth agenda.
2. On the basis of the evidence provided up to this point in the process, the Council support the Orange Route Option. The Purple and Pink options would have significantly greater environmental disbenefits, and are therefore not supported. This is subject to any final alignment and confirmation that the existing A428 will be retained as a local road providing local access to communities along the route.
3. Support proposals for the Black Cat roundabout which enable free flowing traffic on all the strategic routes as well as providing all movements on the local road network (Options A and C).
4. Advise Highways England that the Council is seeking to ensure that future design for the Caxton Gibbet junction minimises impacts on nearby existing and planned developments, including Cambourne West.
5. Advise Highways England that the scheme should not prejudice the delivery of any future strategic proposals, including the A1 improvement scheme and wider Oxford to Cambridge Expressway proposals.
6. Advise Highways England that the scheme should not prejudice Greater Cambridge City Deal proposals for the A428 corridor, including bus and cycle improvement measures, and where possible synergies should be sought.
7. The Council supports the intention to provide opportunities for improving access for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians and would urge Highways England to secure opportunities for the enhancement of existing and/or provision of new infrastructure to the highest standard. The scheme should also seek to redress severance caused by the existing road through the provision of crossings at appropriate points.
8. The Council would like to explore Legacy opportunities with Highways England.

Considerations

29. The Council is a statutory consultee for the A428 improvement scheme. It is recommended the Council responds to the current consultation to ensure the interests of its residents and the environmental impacts are appropriately considered by Highways England in developing their Preferred Route.
30. As work on the improvement scheme progresses there will be further opportunities for the Council to respond to and address issues in more detail.

Options

31. Alternative options would be for the Council not to respond to the consultation, but given the importance to the district this is not recommended. The Council could make a different response, or add additional comments.

Implications

32. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Financial

33. This is a nationally funded road scheme.

Legal

34. The District Council is a statutory consultee for the A428 improvement scheme and will have a role in the process relating to the delivery of this scheme; through responding to the Preferred Route consultation and participating in the DCO Examination in Public process.

Staffing

35. The Council will need to continue to be involved in the A428 scheme as it evolves, including through the formal DCO process. At this stage staff time within the Planning Policy, Consultancy Unit, Major Developments, and Environmental Health teams will be met through existing resources, but this will need to be kept under review.

Equality and Diversity

36. The improvement scheme should help to redress severance issues along the A428 corridor and provide opportunities for improving access for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians along the existing A428 which will be retained as a local road.

Climate Change

37. The new road could be designed to be more resilient to climate change, including potential for increasing capacity of drainage systems, providing surfacing more resistant to extreme weather conditions and improvement in air quality to local communities.

Consultation responses

38. A number of Council services have been consulted in the preparation of this report, including Planning and New Communities, and Environmental Health.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – Living Well

39. Careful realignment of the A428 away from existing communities provides the opportunity to improve the quality of life and safety of local residents and maintain South Cambridgeshire as an attractive place to live.

Aim 2 – Homes for our future

40. Capacity of the A428 is an important issue for the economy of the area and the wider development strategy.

Aim 3 – Connected communities

41. The A428 is a key part of the transport infrastructure of the area, and impacts on quality of life.

Appendices

Appendix 1: A428 Route Options and Options for the Black Cat roundabout

Background Papers

The A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Route Options consultation documents can be found on the Highways England website:

<https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a428-black-cat-to-caxton-gibbet/>

Autumn Statement 2016:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2016-documents>

Road Investment Strategy (RIS):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-investment-strategy-for-the-2015-to-2020-road-period>

Report Author: Claire Spencer – Senior Planning Policy Officer
Telephone: (01954) 714318