



**REPORT TO:** Cabinet

1 July 2019

**LEAD CABINET MEMBER(S)** Cllr Aidan Van de Weyer

**LEAD OFFICER:** Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development

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### **A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Preferred Route consultation: initial response points**

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform South Cambridgeshire District Council's response to the current A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Preferred Route consultation, by setting out initial response points to inform discussion of key issues by Cabinet and local members, ahead of a full response being authorised by the Deputy Leader in an out of cycle decision.
2. This is not a key decision. It was first published in the October 2017 Forward Plan.

#### **Recommendations**

3. That Cabinet:
  - (a) Discuss and agree broad points to make in response to the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Preferred Route consultation.
  - (b) Agree to delegate the wording of the final joint response and any individual response to the consultation to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory) of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

#### **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, although it is not required to enable delivery of any allocations identified in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018. The road has an impact on the environment and economy of the district. The Preferred Route passes through parts of the district. This makes the Council a statutory consultee in the consultation process. It is therefore the responsibility of the Council to ensure it is fully involved/engaged in the various stages of the project to ensure the interests of the district and those of residents affected by the development are robustly represented.
5. The timings of this current consultation are short and don't fit well with the South Cambridgeshire committee cycle. This report therefore sets out broad response points for discussion, to be refined following the meeting, with final sign-off by the

Joint Director of Planning & Economic Development in consultation with the Deputy Leader. Discussion with neighbouring authorities suggests that most concerns with the consultation are shared, and that there is potential to include South Cambridgeshire's comments within a joint response.

## **Background**

### A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvements scheme

6. The A428 between the A1 junction near St Neots and the A1198 Caxton Gibbet is single carriageway with a series of roundabouts and give-way junctions. It experiences major delays during peak periods, resulting in delays and reduced speeds. With few available diversions, incidents and accidents result in disruption over a wide area.
7. Highways England states that the A428 is an important route in an area of the country where considerable growth in housing and employment is planned. It provides a connection between the M1 and East Coast ports, and is sited within the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc which is an area of focus for government, seeking to build upon existing economic strengths.

### Scheme objectives

8. Highways England state in the consultation material that the scheme is intended to:
  - Reduce congestion and delays
  - Increase road capacity
  - Improve journey time reliability
  - Support the growth identified in local plans
  - Improve safety
  - Provide alternative access to local roads
  - Help the transport network to better cope with road maintenance and with incidents such as collisions, breakdowns, maintenance
  - Improve the environmental impact of transport on communities along the existing A428 route
  - Provide improved routes between communities for cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians
  - Reconnect communities
  - Improve safe and effective access for public transport users

### Project timeline

9. The project timeline is as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
March – April 2017	Consultation on Route Options
February 2019	Preferred Route Announcement and further engagement with local community representatives and landowners
2019	Site surveys including topographical studies, traffic modelling, ecological surveys and ground investigation at key locations along the route
<b>3 June – 28 July 2019</b>	<b>Current stage: Public consultation takes place on the developed route option</b>
2019	Further develop the scheme incorporating input from all consultees

2020	Submit application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) & DCO Examination
2021/2 to 2025/6	Start of works – subject to the necessary approvals, construction is expected to proceed in 2021/22

Previous stages: Preferred Route consultation

10. The Council, under the previous administration, responded to the consultation on Route Options (Spring 2017), expressing a preference for the Orange Route, which is now the Preferred Route (with some minor revisions). For more details, see the minutes of Cabinet from April 2017 (link provided in the background papers).

Current stage: detailed alignment consultation (3 June – 28 July 2019)

11. Following the announcement of a preferred route in February 2019, Highways England launched an eight-week consultation on the preferred route on 3 June 2019 and is seeking views on the detailed alignment, junction designs, enhanced routes for non-motorised vehicles and plans for environmental mitigation. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 28 July 2019.

**Approach to responding to the consultation**

12. The South Cambridgeshire District Council constitution sets out that the Deputy Leader has delegated authorisation to sign off the Council’s response to consultations such as these, liaising with ward members. Given the impacts on communities of this significant project, and that the previous A428 consultation response was undertaken under the previous administration, the purpose of bringing this report to Cabinet is therefore to allow for open debate by Cabinet of the principle of the scheme and broad response points to consultation.
13. Highways England is consulting for a relatively short period for a project of this magnitude, using timings that don’t fit well with the South Cambridgeshire committee cycle. Officers within the Council from a range of specialisms including planning, communities, health, environmental health, landscape, ecology and legal are currently preparing comments to inform a full response to the consultation. Ahead of the Cabinet report publication deadline it has not been possible to prepare a full draft response.
14. Instead, it is proposed that Cabinet discusses the key response points set out below, adding or amending points raised as appropriate, and specifically delegates to the Deputy Leader to sign-off the full response ahead of the close of consultation on 28 July. Input will be sought from members for the wards affected by the project ahead of submission. The paragraphs in the section below therefore set out high-level response points to the consultation, based upon an initial reading of the consultation material. Given the short timescales involved these are not comprehensive – a verbal update of any additional points will be provided in the meeting.
15. Further to the above, officers are engaging with local partners, including with Cambridgeshire County Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, Cambridge City Council, Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Combined Authority. It is currently intended that some or all of these partners produce a joint response, to be agreed by the Deputy Leader following Cabinet.

**Suggested high level points to make in response to the consultation**

16. Support the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvements project in principle, subject to:
- (a) clarification on the transport impacts of the road, in particular in relation to the Government's and South Cambridgeshire's net zero carbon ambitions. Outstanding questions include but are not limited to:
    - (i) drawing on the information provided in the consultation booklet p45, how much of the assumed increase in vehicles per hour associated with the new road is redirected traffic, removing vehicles from rat-running on local roads; assumed growth; or does the creation of the road induce more trips?
    - (ii) what are assumed origins and destinations of the traffic using the new road?
    - (iii) How much of any new traffic is expected to reach Cambridge and what will it do when it gets there? In particular, the Council is concerned that the provision of a single lane on the A428 at the Girton interchange, being created as part of the ongoing A14 improvement project, may be insufficient to accommodate current and future numbers of vehicles that will be using the road.
    - (iv) What is the assumed inter-relationship of trip generation in relation to the proposed East West Rail Central Section project?
  - (b) More information is required on junction design, traffic management of existing A428 when new A428 comes online and to address the traffic impacts on communities during construction.
  - (c) Clarification that the new road and associated road network improvements will support the efficient flow of public transport provision.
  - (d) Further clarification that the project will achieve a quantified biodiversity net gain. Government has a clearly stated ambition for net gain as set out in its 25 Year Environment Plan, and restated for the Oxford-Cambridge 'the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Government ambition and joint declaration between Government and local partners. South Cambridgeshire has a similar ambition, and therefore expects the A428 improvements to support this target. The Council considers the statements in the current consultation to be weak, and seeks confirmation of how the project will achieve a net gain target: (page 37 of the report currently states 'We are committed to maintaining existing levels of biodiversity where possible and leaving a positive legacy for nearby communities by providing new landscape planting and wildlife areas'). The issue is about more than mitigating the scheme's direct impacts, this is about the scheme making a positive contribution to biodiversity through net gain in a positive, pro-active and integrated way.
17. Further to the principle of the project, ask that in developing the Development Consent Order, Highways England responds to the following points:
- (a) In relation to South Cambridgeshire's net zero carbon ambition, there is a need for the project to maximise support for Non-Motorised User (NMU) modes along the whole of the route. Clarification on the approach to this is requested, as the proposal does not include a segregated NMU provision along the route.
  - (b) Clarification of the proposed approach to air quality, noise and vibration monitoring and enforcement before, during and after construction.

- (c) Clarification in relation to the environmental and social impacts of the proposed scheme, including the need to ensure the red line boundary (defined extent of the development consent application) includes sufficient land to mitigate the scheme (landscaping, biodiversity net gain); in terms of sourcing materials (for example from reuse of materials and/or sourcing from local borrow pits), the location of any site compounds and materials storage sites to minimise impacts on local communities. Experience from the A14 construction has demonstrated that not enough accommodation was provided either on site or caravan sites for transient road crews, which led to illegal encampments in Huntingdonshire; this will need to be considered early in the process to provide appropriate solutions.
18. The Council's experience of the A14 Development Consent Order and construction has been that it has generated a significant number of complaints from residents impacted by the construction. The Council expects Highways England to learn lessons from this scheme, and provide clarity upfront through the DCO process as to how issues are going to be addressed. In addition there will be a need for timely and effective communication and engagement with local communities, including with individuals who do not have access to mainstream social media. Clarification will also be sought on potential Legacy opportunities for local communities, similar to those provided by the A14 improvement scheme.
19. The Council's experience of the A14 Development Consent Order and construction has been that Council input to the process has taken very substantial officer time over a period of years. This has led to Highways England funding a post within the Council late in the process to support this work. It can be expected that the A428 Development Consent Order and construction process will also give rise to the need for significant Council officer input. Based upon the above, to ensure that the Council can contribute effectively to the A428 project, Council officers will seek to engage with Highways England in the near future to discuss a Planning Performance Agreement, including financial contributions to enable the Council to resource this process. This should help to ensure a better working relationship with Highways England. Officers will also continue to work closely with local partners, in particular Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council throughout the project.

### **Options**

20. Cabinet may decide to:
- Agree the high-level response points without amendment or addition, delegating the wording of the final response to the consultation to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, in consultation with the Deputy Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
  - Agree the high-level response points with amendments and/or additions, delegating the wording of the final response to the consultation to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, in consultation with the Deputy Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

### **Implications**

21. 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***

22. This is a nationally funded road scheme.

**Legal**

23. The District Council is a statutory consultee for the A428 improvement scheme and will have a role in the Development Consent Order process relating to the development and delivery of this scheme.

**Staffing**

24. 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, Communities, and Environmental Health teams will be met through existing resources, but this will need to be kept under review. (see paragraph 18)

**Equality and Diversity**

25. 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**

26. 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.

**Effect on Council Priority Areas**

**Priority 1 - Growing local businesses and economies**

The A428 is an important route in an area of the country where considerable growth in housing and employment is planned, and is important to the national, regional and local economies.

**Background Papers**

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Current A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Preferred Route consultation documents:

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

Minutes of Cabinet 20 April 2017 considering the response to the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Route Options Consultation:

<http://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/ie/ListDocuments.aspx?CId=293&MId=6799&Ver=4>

**Appendices:**

None

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