

Planning and Highways Delegations Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 June 2021 at 2pm at Norfolk Showground

Voting Members Present:

Cllr Martin Wilby (Chair)	Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure
Cllr Andy Grant (Vice-Chair)	Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste
Cllr Graham Plant	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy

Non-Voting Members Present:

Cllr Brian Long	Planning (Regulatory) Committee Chair
Cllr Paul Neale	Planning (Regulatory) Committee Green Group Spokesperson
Cllr Eric Vardy	Planning (Regulatory) Committee Vice-Chair

Officers Present:

David Cumming	Strategic Transport Team Manager
Stephen Faulkner	Principal Planner (Infrastructure and Growth)
Laura Waters	Senior Planner, Growth and Infrastructure

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 No apologies were received; Cllr Steve Riley and Cllr Mike Sands were absent.

2. Election of Chair

- 2.1 Cllr Martin Wilby was duly elected as Chair for the ensuing Council year.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

- 3.1 Cllr Grant was duly elected as Vice-Chair for the ensuing Council year.

4. Minutes

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. Declarations of Interest

- 5.1 There were no interests declared.

6. Urgent Business

- 6.1 There was no urgent business discussed.

7. A47 North Tuddenham to Easton dualling

7.1.1 The Committee received the report detailing the opportunity to submit representations to the Planning Inspectorate on a proposal by Highways England to dual the A47 between North Tuddenham and Easton. The proposal was deemed to be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. Highways England's application for development consent would be determined by the Secretary of State.

7.1.2 The Strategic Transport Team Manager introduced the report to the Committee:

- The proposed scheme followed an alignment south of the A47 at the western end and predominantly north at the eastern end and would complete dualling from Dereham to the Southern Bypass.
- The Junction at Fox Lane in Hockering would include an overbridge allowing access to the village at the western end.
- The scheme included provision for walkers and cyclists including an east west link.
- This dualling scheme was in a similar geographic location to the Norwich Western Link development and in terms of timescale of completion. The Norwich Western Link was proposed to go ahead via the Wood Lane Junction, shown in appendix B of the report.
- Comments on the proposals were included in the report and it was recommended that Members of the Committee agreed these as part of the representation to the submission from NCC.
- Important points to consider were:
 - Traffic issues on the local road network due to changes brought about by the dualling. These would be mitigated by the Norwich Western Link, but the council would want to see an agreed mitigation plan if this development did not go ahead or were to be delayed;
 - Connections to the food enterprise park as detailed in the report;
 - Norfolk County Council taking on responsibility for part of the de-trunked asset as detailed in the report. No agreement had been made to accept the Highways England assets and further research would be carried out before a decision was made.
- All Local Members to the application area were contacted pre- and post-election for detailed comments and none were received.

7.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy queried the de-trunked section of road; he requested that officers ensure this part of the road was as high quality as possible if taken on as an asset by NCC, to reduce the cost of upkeep for the Council.
- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy agreed with local users' concerns set out in the report that temporary measures to be put in place for cycle tracks on Wood Lane may become long term measures.
- A Member noted that the scheme documentation showed two way annual traffic flow on the A47 between Hockering and Honingham was modest compared to the rest of the network and other parts of the UK, and that other studies of the A47 showed traffic between Easton and Tuddenham was mostly local. The member queried why data used to develop the scheme was taken from traffic surveys pre-dating the Covid-19 pandemic when it was likely that the pandemic would cause long term changes to travel habits. The Member felt this could leave decisions open to legal challenge. The Strategic Transport Team Manager replied that officers were happy there were robust traffic models in place the robustness of which would be examined as part of the DCO

application by Highways England.

- A Committee Member was concerned about a possible increase in greenhouse gases which may be caused by the scheme by an increase in road capacity facilitating an increase in traffic. The Strategic Transport Team Manager replied that the proposed representation in the report flagged up issues around carbon emissions and climate change and discussed the environmental policy adopted by the Council in 2019. There was a challenging target in place on carbon neutrality by 2030 and officers would work with Highways England to identify how they would work with the Council towards this target.
- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy highlighted information in the final paragraph on page 40 of the report setting out that “no significant effects as a result of climate change are anticipated” but that “this will be reviewed when updated climate projections become available”. The Cabinet Member noted that increasing use of electric cars and reduced use of petrol and diesel cars over the coming years would also have a positive impact on carbon emissions.
- A Committee Member pointed out the issue of queues on the A47 which resulted in cars idling, increasing car emissions and reducing air quality. The Strategic Transport Team Manager agreed that the scheme would reduce queuing on this stretch of road.
- The Chairman noted that the scheme would improve journey times, support Norfolk’s economy, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic and would improve road safety and noted that MPs supported dualling of the A47.
- A Committee member asked if the assessment that carbon emissions would reduce was evidence based. The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy highlighted paragraph 3.34 of the report which indicated that the Highways England assessment concluding it was “unlikely that the construction of the scheme would have a significant effect on air quality or affect the UK’s ability to comply with the Air Quality Directive” and that “during the operation of the scheme there would be no significant adverse effects on the air quality at both human and ecological receptors.”

7.3 The **voting Members of the** Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Support the principle of dualling the A47 between North Tuddenham and Easton subject to:
 - (a) The implementation of appropriate highway, historic environment, and surface water conditions / requirements being resolved through the DCO process
 - (b) The detailed comments set out in this report being addressed through the DCO process.
2. Agree the initial representation to the proposal, as set out in the relevant sections of the report.

8. Sheringham and Dudgeon Windfarm Extension Projects Consultation

8.1.1 The Committee received the report setting out proposals for extensions to the Dudgeon and Sheringham Shoal offshore windfarms, which would be determined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project under the Planning Act 2008. Norfolk County Council was a statutory consultee on such projects and therefore had the opportunity to comment at the pre-application stage of the proposals. Responding to such consultations would ensure the County Council’s views were formally considered prior to a final decision being made by the Secretary of State.

8.1.2 The Senior Planner, Growth and Infrastructure, introduced the report to the Committee:

The Committee agreed this amendment at its meeting of 27 August 2021; please view the minutes of that meeting to see the amendment made

- The project consisted of two extensions covered by one Development Consent Order (DCO) which made landfall at Weybourne with the cable corridor running through to the Norwich Main substation where an additional substation was proposed.
- Equinor had set out that they wanted an integrated approach which was fully supported by Norfolk County Council.
- The proposal would double the generation capacity of the existing windfarms and generate enough power for 825,000 homes.
- The scheme positively contributed towards achieving national decarbonisation targets.
- Section 3 of the report included comments assessing the proposals, in addition to further detailed comments set out in appendix 1; officers were working positively with the applicant to address these matters.
- section 3.9-3.14 set out the ongoing work by officers to advance discussions on Norfolk contributing to the national decarbonisation agenda whilst ensuring positive outcomes for local communities. Officers were meeting with the offshore wind farm developers and National Grid to explore what local benefits can be delivered as part of new infrastructure. Officers had also written to the secretary of state asking for a strategic review of current and future electricity and energy networks.
- At the time of writing the report, due to local elections, it was not possible to engage with Local Members. Since the election Local Members at the landfall site, along the cable corridor and substation site had been consulted on the proposals with no comments received.

8.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The Chair hoped that discussions about securing benefits for communities as part of hosting such infrastructure proceeded positively.
- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy welcomed the developers aim for an integrated approach to the proposals as this would benefit the planning and infrastructure requirements.
- A Committee Member queried whether business rate retention on renewable energy schemes for District Councils at the location of landfall was still in place. The Principal Planner (Infrastructure and Growth) was not aware of any change in this regard but would find out and circulate to the Committee if there had been any regulatory/legislative changes.
- Discussions about local community benefit were ongoing with Equinor and officers were advocating that this is made part of the DCO process.
- The Vice Chair queried about the opportunity to use the cable corridor as a footpath and cycle way; The Senior Planner, Infrastructure and Growth, agreed to explore this matter with Equinor and report back to the Vice-Chair.
- A Committee Member discussed feedback he had received from communities noting the impact on highways, ecology and the local communities were their main concerns and was pleased to see the report noted that many of these were concerns had been or were in the process of being addressed.
- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy noted the benefits to employment creation, both during construction of the project and in the long term.
- A Committee Member noted information in the report stating that the County Council favoured an integrated approach to delivering the proposals as set out by Equinor but was concerned about any potential delay to the project if the integrated approach could not be taken. The Member also queried the future

consultation process and asked if Members will be consulted on the next stages of the application. That authority was being delegated to officers too soon. The Principal Planner clarified that there would be an opportunity once the DCO was submitted to bring this application back to the Committee for more comments; the recommendation set out in this report was for the pre-application stage only.

8.3 The **voting Members of the** Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. To support the principle of these offshore renewable energy proposals, subject to the detailed comments set out in this report and Appendix 1 being resolved through the DCO process; and
2. To delegate any further detailed technical responses needed to officers as part of the above consultation and/or in preparing any further evidence for the Examination of the DCO.

9 A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction

9.1.1 The Committee received the report dealing with an opportunity to submit representations to the Planning Inspectorate on a proposal by Highways England to upgrade the existing A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction. The proposal was deemed to be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) and Highways England's application for development consent would be determined by the Secretary of State.

9.1.2 The Strategic Transport Team Manager introduced the report to the Committee:

- Improvements were designed to tackle congestion at the existing junction by providing a new link to take major traffic flows from and to London and Great Yarmouth.
- New infrastructure would also link Cantley Lane South to the B1172 to Hethersett; access was currently onto the slip-road at the junction. This would not be part of the new trunk road network and would be taken on as a new asset by Norfolk County Council. The Council did not support this new link being a B class road as this would encourage more traffic to use it, but instead would prefer it to be class C or U.
- When taking the new link road on as a new asset, officers were asking for a commuted sum for maintenance.
- Officers had contacted local Members for comments, and none had been received.

9.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy was in support of the proposals set out in the report, noting that the improvements would increase traffic flow at the junction via a direct route to Great Yarmouth, helping to improve air quality and supporting Norfolk's economy.
- A Committee Member felt that this work was essential infrastructure given the long queues often seen at this location and agreed that the improvements would improve air quality and traffic flow.
- A Committee Member asked how many veteran trees would be affected by this scheme and if land was being set aside to plant trees elsewhere. The Strategic Transport Team Manager agreed to confirm this information and circulate to the Committee.

The Committee agreed this amendment at its meeting of 27 August 2021; please view the minutes of that meeting to see the amendment made

- Cllr Neale asked for his statement in objection to this scheme to be appended to the minutes; please see appendix A.
- The Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy addressed the comments made by Cllr Neale by commenting that the Broadland Northway took traffic around the city instead of through it, resulting in a freer flow of traffic. The Cabinet Member pointed out that car travel was necessary for many people to travel across the County and this development would increase the ease of travel for emergency services, buses, residents and visitors to the County's £2.5bn tourism industry. The Cabinet Member discussed plans to plant trees in Norfolk through the Queens Green Canopy and one million trees projects and noted that all trees affected by County Council infrastructure were replaced.
- The Vice-Chair noted that it was not possible to put infrastructure for bus or train travel in all locations in Norfolk meaning that good road infrastructure was required to improve traffic flow and support improved flow of buses.
- The Chair supported the scheme, noting it would have a positive impact on road safety and Norfolk's economy.

9.3 The **voting Members of the** Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. **Support** the principle of upgrading the existing A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction subject to:
 - (a) The implementation of appropriate highway, historic environment, and surface water conditions / requirements being resolved through the DCO process
 - (b) The detailed comments set out in this report being addressed through the DCO process.
2. **Agree** the initial representation to the proposal, as set out in the relevant sections of the report.

The meeting ended at 15:20

CHAIRMAN



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The Committee agreed this amendment at its meeting of 27 August 2021; please view the minutes of that meeting to see the amendment made

Appendix A

Statement by Cllr Paul Neale

It seems to me that the committee members have missed the elephant in the room and only addressed the car-county issue. When Highways England as the highways agency first proposed improvements to Thickthorn junction they suggested a scheme primarily assisting buses serving new housing along the A11 corridor as part of the development of a bus rapid transit network for Greater Norwich by 2026 but NCC did not want a sustainable transport solution, they wanted to increase the traffic carrying capacity of Thickthorn junction to accommodate more short distance single occupant car commuters living in Attleborough, Wymondham and Hethersett, to name a few.

They wanted to enable more car drivers in Norwich to make short car journeys using the southern bypass as a local distributor road. This heavily over engineered scheme plan based on pre-Covid travel plan patterns which will be so highly damaging to the local and global environment is the outcome.

In addition, the County Council want to expand Thickthorn park and ride onto more countryside. But why not improve the bus services along the A11 corridor so that drivers can leave their cars at home and bus all the way?

Regrettably, the County Council has made limited progress on its promise in the joint core strategy to develop a bus network. The county council raised £205m for the NDR but has secured very little for the bus rapid transport costed at £140m in 2008.

The £32m from the Government's Transforming Cities Fund for sustainable transport will not go far enough and in any case the county wants to spend some of the money on schemes such as Thickthorn park and ride and improving traffic flow at roundabouts. The traffic network would be extensively expanded to accommodate most tourists at the expense of vulnerable road users by replacing the current over bridge for pedestrians and cyclists across the southern bypass to Cantley Lane with a new link road to this attractive, quiet and safe rural road for cyclists between Norwich and Wymondham would become an alternative route for drivers and its wide road would encourage fast driving to the detriment of cyclists

This scheme would fragment or concrete over ancient countryside around Norwich that includes woodland, mature hedgerows parkland and small streams and ponds. It would strip an extensive area of biodiversity that includes the permanent loss of aquatic environment at Cantley stream through realignment. Water-voles, otters, bats, barn owls, reptiles and other scarce wildlife would be drive out. Valuable habitat that would be lost include veteran oaks. Saplings cannot offset carbon emissions or replace the loss of veteran oaks housing 2-300 species. It would confirm yet again that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world ranking 193 out of 280 countries.

Norfolk is planning to plant 1m trees but that only accounts for less than 1 tree per acre. This is just one of four road schemes being planned around the outskirts of Norwich; their cumulative impact will see the replacement of complex habitats with concrete making the city region even less biodiverse and hotter places to live. today the un is urging political leaders that the wold must rewild on a massive scale to heal nature and climate. It is a warning that existing conservation efforts are not sufficient to prevent widespread biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse but in Norfolk our decision makers are showing

their indifference by voting to destroy what little nature we have left so they can keep on building a car county

I urge you to think carefully and to vote against this spaghetti junction.