

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Report title:	Market Town Transport Network Improvement Strategies
Date of meeting:	8 March 2019
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact This proposal will support the county council's vision for Norfolk. We will aim to put in the necessary infrastructure first to ensure that we build new communities where growth is being planned. The work will facilitate Norfolk's market towns' and larger villages' sustainable development through addressing the transport pressures of planned housing and employment growth by improving access to public transport and reducing congestion.	

Executive summary

In September 2017, Members agreed a programme of studies looking at the transport impacts of growth in market towns. At that time members agreed the programme of studies to be started in 2018, Subsequently, in July 2018, Members agreed the programme for 2019.

This report provides an update on the programme. It asks Members to adopt the Dereham Network Improvement Strategy and note the key findings and messages from the other towns in the first round of studies, which will be brought to members for adoption later in the year.

The key areas of work in the first round of studies include: assessing the implications on the transport network of future growth, and the likely infrastructure requirements; consideration of walking and cycling connections within the towns; and examination of potential solutions to some of the key issues in each town. Section 5 of the report outlines the findings in detail, but the key ones are:

- Dereham: An assessment of the likely impacts of growth beyond the emerging local plan on the transport network and examination of link roads associated with each growth scenario.
- Diss: Assessment of the amount of through traffic, which suggests that issues within the town would not be resolved by new link roads
- Swaffham: Assessment of the amount of through traffic, which suggests that a large proportion of traffic has a destination within the town and a north-south bypass would be difficult to justify
- Thetford: Assessment of traffic issues in the south of the town, and the town centre, which suggests that there is a key desire line for traffic from the north of the town, essentially between the A1088 and A134, together with congestion and traffic issues either currently experienced, or likely to manifest in the future, including on Nuns Bridges Road. Further work is being considered.
- North Walsham: Consideration of potential solutions to HGV issues in the town, which require further work and assessment to resolve, together with identifying a suitable site for a public transport interchange and making the market place more pedestrian-friendly.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- 1. Agree and adopt the final Dereham Network Improvement Strategy**
- 2. Note the key findings from the remaining first round studies for Diss, Swaffham, Thetford and North Walsham**
- 3. Note progress with the second round of studies in Aylsham, Downham Market, Fakenham, Wroxham/ Hoveton and Wymondham.**

1. Proposal

- 1.1. Members are asked to adopt the Dereham Network Improvement Strategy, note the key findings and messages from the other towns in the first round of studies, which will be brought to members for adoption later in the year, and to note progress with the studies that have started in 2019.

2. Network Improvement Strategies: 2018 Programme

- 2.1. This section deals with the studies agreed by Members in 2017, which are drawing to a close. The Network Improvement Strategy for Dereham has been completed, and members are being asked to adopt this.

The remainder of the studies will be completed shortly. Most of the technical work has been undertaken and the key findings from the studies are – in most cases – known. These key findings have been circulated to the relevant stakeholders (see Section 5) in advance of the committee and any relevant comments will be reported verbally.

2.2. Dereham

The Dereham Network Improvement Strategy (DNIS) in collaboration with stakeholders has identified potential measures to help address existing transport network constraints and transport improvements to facilitate the growth identified in the emerging Local Plan, which is at an advanced stage. The DNIS has also looked at the longer-term transport situation, carrying out a high-level assessment of potential growth scenarios that can inform future growth options and be used as part of any future Local Plan review.

The main areas of work looked at in the DNIS were:

- Review current operation of B1135 roundabout
- Identify key cycle corridors and improvements for routes
- Review signage so people are directed most efficiently
- Lobby Highways England for improvements to Draytonhall Lane
- High level assessment of future scenarios that can inform growth options and be part of a future Local Plan review.

Other work included a Cycle Corridor study, Town Centre Parking & Access study and Future Scenario Testing report. This work produced some key findings:

- 40% of the town's population work within three miles of their home
- Only 3.7% of journeys to work were completed by bicycle which is below the county average of 4.8%. Development of a cycle corridor could improve this
- It is estimated that traffic levels during the AM and PM peak periods will increase by 30-31% by 2037 and on Saturday the level is expected to increase by 34%
- There is a typical amount of motor vehicle collisions and whilst there is no single hotspot of collisions they are concentrated along the key routes in

- and out of the town and in the town centre
- The town will benefit from the signage changes set out in the strategy and have the potential to improve road operating conditions for all users.

Based on the feedback from stakeholders and findings from the study work the action plan recommends areas where consideration should be given in the form of short, medium and long-term actions. Norfolk County Council has funding committed to the delivery of short term schemes that can be delivered within the next two years. These are the development of a cycle corridor linking the town centre to growth sites in the south and a signing review to destinations within the town centre from the A47. This will avoid directing all traffic through the most congested part of the town around Yaxham Road / Tavern Lane. In the medium and longer-term it will be critical for the council to work collaboratively with local partners to deliver on other opportunities.

The final DNIS, which members are asked to agree and adopt, is available to view in the Members room at County Hall. It is also available on the county council website: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/policies-and-strategies/roads-and-travel-policies/market-town-network-improvement-strategy>. We have carried out a consultation on the strategy with positive feedback including comments from the district council who found it provides a range of useful new evidence and presents a clear picture of the issues, but also opportunities in the town. The About Dereham group welcomed the rounded approach to considering the various transport issues that have concerned members of their partnership. We have subsequently amended the final version of the strategy to address the feedback received.

2.3. **Diss**

The areas identified from the evidence-gathering and stakeholder engagement, and subsequently agreed to be undertaken in the study, were:

- Understand through traffic situation passing via Diss
- Assess existing situation at key junctions on A1066
- Identify network improvements to walking and cycling
- Understand the impacts of future growth options.

The cycling and walking study looked at developing the proposed walking and cycling corridor options connecting residential zones with the town centre, and better connections to the rail station. It is looking at physical interventions and signage improvements to increase walking and cycling in the town.

The Through Traffic Assessment found that the key through movement within Diss is between A1066 to the west and A143 and A140 to the south. Through movements to/from the north are less prominent. Two new link road options were assessed, one to the north of the town from the A1066 to A140; and one to the south from the A1066 to A143 across the river Waveney.

It is concluded however that the link road options could not be justified in traffic terms. If they were to be brought forward as part of future large-scale growth, the traffic impacts of that growth are likely to outweigh any benefits of a link road.

Work is ongoing looking at the impacts of different scales and locations of growth on key junctions on the A1066, to identify if there are any measures that can improve the current situation and enable future growth.

2.4. **Swaffham**

The areas identified from the evidence-gathering and stakeholder engagement, and subsequently agreed to be undertaken in the study, were parking issues on Station Street, Station Street/Mangate Street junction, improved access to the Theatre Street car park (all arising from air quality issues within the town) and an assessment of through traffic.

The study found, taking each in turn:

- Station Street: The times and durations of parking violations appear to be very short. Most of the delay and queuing is associated with the traffic signal junction
- Station Street/Mangate Street: Minor improvements to the junction could improve the capacity. This is being considered further
- Theatre Street car park: Signing and access to the car park appear to be operating successfully. Providing access from the south appears feasible
- Assessment of through traffic: Less than half of traffic accessing the town is through traffic, the remainder having a destination within Swaffham. Of the through traffic, around $\frac{1}{4}$ of the traffic from the south heads towards King's Lynn and $\frac{1}{4}$ towards the north. Therefore, if a link road / bypass were to be considered, the evidence would suggest it should serve the south to west movement as much as south to north: As such, any bypass should be to the west of the town. However, given the relatively low traffic flows that would be carried by any new road, and the costs of any new road, the evidence suggests that it would be very difficult to make a case for a bypass link from the A1065 in the south to the A47 in the west; or to continue to the A1065 in the north.

2.5. **Thetford**

The areas identified from the evidence-gathering and stakeholder engagement included congestion, connectivity to the main urban extensions in the north of the town, cycling, and a number of detailed traffic issues. The further technical work has looked at congestion and connectivity to the 5,000 new dwellings planned for Thetford, cycling and walking and traffic issues in the south of the town including Nuns' Bridges Road; a narrow route used by a number of large vehicles which sometimes get stuck causing congestion.

The Walking and Cycling report looked at the routes below and suggested some improvements with some high-level route costs along the three routes below.

- Route A: London Road, from commercial area at the west of the town to the town centre
- Route B: Croxton Road, connecting the Thetford Urban Extension (west), existing residential areas, the Thetford Academy and town centre
- Route C: Kilverstone, connecting the Thetford Urban Extension (east), Kilverstone, other residential areas and the town centre.

The technical work on congestion and connectivity has found that a number of junctions are currently at, or close to, capacity, or will be in the future given the growth in and around the town. These include A134 Brandon Road / London Road / A134 Bury Road (currently operating over capacity) and A1075 / Norwich Road / A1066 Mundford Road / A1066 Hurth Way Junction (over capacity in peak period in 2036, but phase 1 of the Thetford housing is expected to deliver improvements).

The study also considered issues raised about traffic on Nuns' Bridges Road and found that future traffic growth is likely to cause lengthy queues and delays on this route. The study noted that there is a key desire line for traffic from the

north of the town, essentially between the A1088 and A134. Further work is being put underway to consider the study finding and potential mitigation measures.

2.6. **North Walsham**

The main areas identified from the evidence-gathering and stakeholder engagement, which the study has gone on to examine, are: impacts of the low bridges on HGV access to and around the town; making the market place more pedestrian friendly; and public transport (bus) facilities on Yarmouth Road at the top (east) of the market place. Alongside this work being done as part of the Network Improvement Strategy the council is working with North Norfolk District Council on growth proposals to the west of the town and the associated requirements / opportunities for link road infrastructure.

The study work is ongoing.

3. **Network Improvement Strategies: 2019 Programme**

3.1. This section deals with the studies agreed by Members in 2018, which have recently started. Members are being asked to note progress.

Officers were successful in securing Pooled Business Rates Funding for all the studies except Aylsham. This means that the available budget for each is £40,000 (£20,000 for Aylsham).

3.2. **Aylsham**

The areas identified within our evidence-review and workshops include issues around pedestrian and cycling access, parking, local congestion, links from new residential developments to the town and bus access. The further technical work is likely to focus on car parking signage, review cycling and walking routes, review cycling and walking signage and look at potential new locations for bus stops which currently cause congestion. This is currently being agreed with the stakeholders.

3.3. **Downham Market**

The key issues that have come out of the overall stakeholder engagement phase of this study, and in no particular order, are:

- Car parking around station
- Impacts of charging for town centre car parks
- Congestion by level-crossing
- Issues at a number of junctions in the town including Howdale Road/Church Road junction, Tesco roundabout, Clackclose Road/Lynn Road junction, Appropriateness of Cannon Square junction
- Increased/improved cycle parking and cycle route improvements including formalisation of route from Lynn Road, Cock Drive, Wimbotsham Road and Grimshaw Road
- Potential link between Bennett Street to the Railway Station Car Park
- Impact of through traffic in the town
- Consideration of town centre road layout and possible pedestrianisation

The four key areas to be investigated, which will be circulated to the Town Council and stakeholders for comment, are:

- Parking study to support Town Council car park charging proposals, on street limited waiting anomalies and current problems related to parking around the station.
- Review of the Clackclose Road/Lynn Road junction and need for possible changes

- Review of traffic signal junctions to determine how well they operate and in some cases whether they are still required
- Cycle and walking route study focussing on links to the railway station from new housing areas to determine possible improvements to encourage more walking and cycling

To streamline communications, Downham Market Town Council has convened a working group.

3.4. **Fakenham**

The evidence gathering and stakeholder engagement led to a proposal for further work, circulated to the external stakeholders. Based on feedback we plan to carry out the following tasks:

- Review the location of bus stops along Oak Street
- Propose improvements to relieve congestion at the Creak Rd/A148/A1065/Wells Rd roundabout
- Study the effect on pedestrians of the relocation of traffic island near Pensthorpe Road/George Edward Road junction to ease congestion from the industrial estate
- Propose alternative layout to the Thorpland Rd/Greenway Ln/Holt Rd junction
- Carry out a signage assessment.

This work began at the end of January and is likely to be finished by Mid May 2019. The strategy will be drafted using the findings of this work and completed by autumn 2019.

3.5. **Wroxham/ Hoveton**

Evidence gathering and stakeholder engagement revealed the main priorities for the study work as cycling and walking; traffic flow and congestion; and an assessment of the transport impacts of cumulative growth

Early work was commissioned for a full traffic survey, including an analysis of the amount of through traffic, and to carry out analysis of key traffic issues with a view to subsequently developing short, medium and long-term interventions. Commissioning is currently underway for the remainder of the work.

3.6. **Wymondham**

Evidence gathering has been completed, and the stakeholder engagement meeting arranged for 22 February. The scope of the study will be considered following this prior to being agreed with stakeholders.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. Members agreed at March 2017 EDT committee to put £20k to each of the strategies. Funding for the studies has come from the funding invested in highways as agreed by Members in January 2018 when Members agreed the Highways Capital Programme and Transport Asset Management Plan.
- 4.2. Officers have successfully sought additional match-funding for the current work including from other authorities and organisations and the Pooled Business Rates fund.
- 4.3. The current rounds of studies are being delivered within budget.
- 4.4. As well as funding for the studies, EDT agreed on 18 January 2019 capital funding to take forward measures arising from the programme. Feasibility work is currently being taken forward on schemes for traffic signing to the town centre

and cycling measures in Dereham.

5. Issues, risks and innovation

- 5.1. The studies have considered the impacts on social, environmental and economic factors.

6. Background

- 6.1. In September 2017, Members agreed a programme of studies looking at the transport impacts of growth in market towns. At that time members agreed the programme of studies to be started in 2018, Subsequently, in July 2018, Members agreed the programme for 2019.
- 6.2. Members agreed that the studies should cover, in summary, the following scope:
1. Understand current transport problems and issues
 2. Understand the future situation (growth proposals and their impacts on transport)
 3. Develop implementation plan.
- 6.3. All studies have followed the same broad process in undertaking the work:
- Evidence gathering through engagement with a range of county council officers, desktop studies and contact through the local elected County Council members and district council officers
 - Engagement with the Town Council, initially, followed by engagement through a workshop with stakeholders in each town including district, town and parish councils, sustrans, police, bus operators, business forums and Highways England.
 - Consideration of the above to determine what areas the studies should consider in detail. The proposed scope of the studies and the technical work was circulated to stakeholders for comment before the work commenced. In most cases, we continued to work with the stakeholders through the study process.
 - Final draft of the study report circulated to stakeholders for further comments before its completion.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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