



Report to the Leader (Transport portfolio)

Decision Date: 19 March 2021

Title: **A404/A4155 Westhorpe Junction Improvements Update**

Relevant councillor(s): **Alex Collingwood, David Watson, David Johncock, Richard Scott, Suzanne Brown, Neil Marshall, and Roger Wilson**

Author and/or contact officer: **Kevin Allen and Frances Clarke**

Ward(s) affected: **Marlow, Flackwell Heath, Little Marlow and Marlow Southeast**

Recommendation:

- 1. Approve the implementation of the junction modifications including new northbound off slip segregated slip lane and signalisation of both northbound and southbound off slip roads.**
- 2. Agree to delegate authority to Head of Highways Infrastructure Projects and Westhorpe Project Board to progress the implementation of this improvement scheme and award of the construction contract as well as agreeing appropriate maintenance arrangements for the operation of the junction with Highways England.**
- 3. Agree to an increase in budget from £2,706,498 to £3,796,498 to progress the full implementation of this project. Additional budget to be funded via a combination of the Local Growth Fund and the use of LTB recycled monies.**
- 4. Agree to the release of £3,016,498.00 to progress the project through completion of detailed design, construction mobilisation and construction.**
- 5. Agree to delegate to the Director of Property and Assets to enter into land transfer agreements with Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue and Highways England.**

Reason for decision:

- To improve the performance of the A404 (a key regional north-south link) by reducing the potential for queues to extend onto the main carriageway from the off slip roads at the Westthorpe junction, in particular from the northbound off slip during morning peak hours.
- To boost the local economy and safeguard local jobs by improving access to Globe Business Park.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Congestion and queuing along the northbound slip road of the A404 in Marlow is contributing to higher vacancy rates of premises on Globe Park business park on the eastern side of Marlow.
- 1.2 A partnership of Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Globe Business Park Business Improvement District was formed to identify improvements that could address the congestion. In 2017 a bid to Highways England's Growth and Housing Fund (GHF) was successful in securing £1.87M towards a solution. Further funding sources have been secured to identify £3.8M to address access and congestion problems.
- 1.3 Public consultation in January 2019 confirmed support for the introduction of a new segregated left turn lane on the northbound off slip combined with part-time signalisation of the Westthorpe Junction. Design work has been progressing since then and determined that the current 'most likely' scheme forecast cost is within the available budget. The proposed scheme presents very good value for money and transport modelling results indicate significant congestion and journey time savings will be gained through its implementation.
- 1.4 During the Strategic Transport and Infrastructure Board in December 2019, the following was agreed:
 - To the progression of the scheme into pre-construction and detailed design subject to approval by the Shadow Executive.
 - To the appointment of Balfour Beatty through the SCAPE framework to complete pre-construction.
 - Approval of the acquisition of land from the Fire Service in order to construct the slip lane.Please refer to Appendix A & B for a copy of the board paper and subsequent minutes.
- 1.5 At its meeting on the 18 February 2020 the following decisions were taken by the Shadow Executive:

- That the Shadow Executive approves the commission of the preliminary design phase of the project including ground investigation works (value £375,000 – using secured and released s106/CIL funding).
- That the Shadow Executive notes the risks associated with the scheme.

Please refer to Appendix C & D for a copy of the report and decision notice.

2. Content of Report

- 2.1 The Westhorpe Interchange (A404/ A4155 junction) is located on the outskirts of Marlow. The A404 is managed by Highways England as a key link between the M40 and M4 and can be heavily congested, particularly at peak times. As well as being on the main route into Marlow, the interchange is also the primary access to Globe Business Park (GBP), a large business park on the eastern side of Marlow. GBP contains 750,000 sq. ft. of office space, over 50 companies and over 3,000 employees. It generates over £200m of Gross Value Added (GVA) for the Buckinghamshire economy. The congestion and queuing along the northbound A404 slip road is reducing the appeal of Globe Park business park and contributing to increased vacancy rates.
- 2.2 Congestion at the Westhorpe Interchange is an issue for a range of stakeholders, including Highways England (HE), Buckinghamshire Council (BC), Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (BLEP) and Globe Business Park (GBP). An application was made in March 2016 to HE's Growth and Housing Fund (GHF) for "an integrated package of measures to improve the junction capacity on the Westhorpe Interchange". The bid was successful and a period of optioneering and stakeholder engagement followed. In autumn 2018 three options were shortlisted and taken to consultation in January 2019. Following a well-attended public consultation, it emerged that the new slip road had the strongest support, followed by (part-time) signalisation of the Westhorpe Junction.
- 2.3 Transport modelling confirmed that the combination of the new segregated slip road and signalisation of the off slips is the best performing option in terms of journey time savings. A Transport User Benefits Assessment was also conducted using the outputs of the microsimulation modelling which determined that the scheme also provides the most benefits, £12,174,000 in journey time savings and operating costs over a period of 60 years.
- 2.4 Definition of the three elements of the scheme (see Appendix E and F for general arrangement plans):
- Segregated Left Turn Lane from A404 Northbound off slip road linking onto Parkway, providing Globe Business Park users with direct access, therefore removing queues from the A404 off slip road and A4155.
 - Signalisation of A404 Northbound off slip road.

- Signalisation of A404 Southbound off slip road.

3. Other options considered

3.1 Significant optioneering and transport modelling has been undertaken to determine the most effective option to address the congestion and traffic queues on the A404 as set out in the table 1 below.

Table 1 Options assessed in transport model

Option	Present Value of Benefits (£000s)
Do Something: Right turn ban and signals at Parkway junction + link between Wiltshire Road and Parkway + signals on all slip roads at the A404 grade-separated junction	8,854
Option 1A: Right turn ban and signals at Parkway junction + signals on all slip roads at the A404 grade-separated junction	-6,486
Option 2A: Signalisation of slip road approaches at the A404 grade-separated junction + a new link between the A404 Northbound off-slip and Parkway	4,196
Option 4A: Right turn ban and signals at Parkway junction + part time signals at A404 grade-separated junction + backway trip reduction	-1,444
Option 5: A404 NB off-slip signalised (full-time)	4,905
Option 5a: A404 NB off-slip signalised (part-time)	8,847
Option 5b: A404 NB off-slip signalised (part-time) + a new link between the A404 Northbound off-slip and Parkway	10,679
Option 5c: A404 NB off-slip signalised (part-time) + a new link between the A404 Northbound off-slip and Parkway+ Right turn ban and signals at Parkway junction	4,838
Option 5d: A404 NB off-slip signalised (part-time) + A404 SB off-slip signalised (part-time) + a new link between the A404 Northbound off-slip and Parkway	12,174
Option 6: A404 SB off-slip signalised (full-time)	3,140
Option 7: Signals on all slip roads at the A404 grade-separated junction	4,508
Option 8: New link between the A404 Northbound off-slip and Parkway	9,910

3.2 Option 5d was shown to result in the highest journey time improvements and overall economic benefit.

4. Legal and financial implications

Legal

4.1 The consultation was carried out in accordance with Buckinghamshire County Council's guidance on minimum periods for consulting with the public, providing the opportunity for residents, businesses, stakeholders, and statutory consultees to send in any feedback or comments regarding the scheme.

- 4.2 Legal agreements will need to be in place to formalise land transfer arrangements between Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and Highways England as well as future maintenance responsibilities, such as winter maintenance and the maintenance of signs, traffic signals and street lights.
- 4.3 Buckinghamshire Council acting in its capacity as a highway authority will use its powers under the Highways and Road Traffic Authority to undertake these works.

Funding

- 4.4 This project is funded by several funding streams and the 'most likely' forecast cost for the scheme delivery is £3.796.5M which is within the available budget.
- 4.5 The following table sets out the funding sources for this scheme. A report seeking the approval of securing additional funding from the Local Growth Fund and Local Transport Board (recycled monies) will be presented at the Highways Board on the 17 March and the HIF Investment Board on the 18 March 2021.

Funding Source	Amount	Status
Highways England Growth and Housing Fund	£1,187,000.00	Secured
S106 (BCC)	£262,500.00	Secured
Community Infrastructure Levy	£250,000.00	Secured
Local Authority Business Growth Incentive	£50,000.00	Secured
Local Growth Fund	£60,000.00	Secured
Local Transport Board (recycled monies)	£909,498.00	Secured
	£2,706,498.00	Total Secured Budget
Local Growth Fund (Being re-distributed from the A40 London Rd, High Wycombe scheme - CHA51ACH)	£200,000.00	Unsecured Pending approval at the HIF Investment Board (18/3/21)
Local Transport Board (recycled monies)	£877,500.00	Unsecured Pending approval at the HIF Investment Board (18/3/21)
	£3,796,498.00	Overall Total Budget

5. Corporate implications

Property

- 5.1 The scheme has been designed to current Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) standards and includes changes to the existing highway and the creation of new highway, with the addition of a new segregated left turn lane off the existing northbound exit slip road that will be adopted and maintained by Highways England.
- 5.2 Maintenance responsibilities/boundaries are currently being agreed with Highways England and land transfer agreements are also in progress with Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. See Appendix G and H for the latest draft plans that detail the current land ownership arrangements with Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and future land ownership and maintenance boundaries between the three parties.
- 5.3 The scheme proposals are to be undertaken under Permitted Development rights given to the Council as Highway Authority.

Climate Change and Sustainability

- 5.4 This scheme will address congestion and traffic delays resulting in reduced vehicle emissions and detrimental effects on local air quality.
- 5.5 To facilitate the construction of the new segregated left turn lane off the northbound exit slip lane, it was necessary to carry out vegetation clearance including the removal of trees. Whilst it is not possible to plant replacement trees adjacent to the highway improvements, engagement with local stakeholders is in progress to determine suitable alternative locations where replacement trees can be planted.

Equality Impact Assessment

- 5.6 Under section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 (EA 2010) the Council must, in the exercise of its functions have due regard to the need to:- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the EA 2010; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 5.7 The improvements proposed as described in this report will address congestion at the Westhorpe Interchange and, in doing so, support a growing economy. Throughout the implementation of the scheme the Council is having due regard to the duty under section 149(1) of the EA 2010.

Value for Money

- 5.8 Traffic flows from transport modelling data have been used alongside the changes in journey time demonstrated by the scheme proposals to evaluate the Transport User Benefit Assessment (TUBA) of implementing the proposed scheme improvements. This assessment only takes into account transport savings arising from journey time savings and operating costs but shows the scheme offers very good value for money, generating £12,174,000 of present value of benefits. The current forecast scheme cost is £3.796M and therefore the benefit costs ratio would be in the region of 3.2 representing very high value for money.
- 5.9 The proposed scheme has been subject to a series of cost reduction exercises through review of both the design (early contractor involvement, risk workshops, programming, value engineering etc.) and pre-construction stage (restricted working hours, traffic management plan review and construction cost reviews). Further opportunities to reduce costs will be explored as the construction programme develops.

6. Consultation with local councillors & community boards

- 6.1 Recent consultation has included:
- Cabinet Member for Transport – 11 December 2020
 - Local Member and key stakeholder engagement prior to the vegetation clearance – 4 February 2021
 - Presentation at the South West Chilterns Community Board (Transport Working Group) – 11 February 2021
 - Local Member briefing – 2 March 2021
- 6.2 Feedback from local members at the recent briefing was positive, with all Members present supporting the scheme and keen to see construction commence in July 2021.
- 6.3 The loss of trees was raised as a concern; however, Members were pleased to see plans are in progress to engage with local stakeholders to agree suitable locations to plant replacement trees.
- 6.4 Whilst Members did acknowledge that the primary objectives of the scheme were to improve the performance of the A404, improve the ingress of traffic off the northbound exit slip road into Parkway and improve the occupancy rate at Globe Business Park, Members did raise concerns that despite this investment, the

challenges of egress from Parkway on to the A4155 Little Marlow Road remain largely unresolved. It was recognised that a future scheme will be required to fully resolve these issues.

- 6.5 Following the 02/03/21 Member briefing, Councillor David Watson emailed Richard Ambrose to suggest that further funding options should be explored to resolve the egress issues at Globe Park at the same time as the current project resolves the ingress issues. An excerpt from his email is as follows:

“The objective of the £3.9M expenditure is to improve access but that still leaves the issue of egress unresolved. The works are planned on the Westhorpe roundabout site during the next 12 months and I would ask what could now be done to finance the installation of traffic lights to control the egress from the site at the same time. I would suggest that the council either uses S106 monies or CIL (from the former WDC balance or from 20/21 generated CIL). Could you, as part of your planned review of the former Wycombe CIL, make this a priority please? I am advised that the traffic lights would cost circa £130k.”

- 6.6 Whilst this report has already highlighted that significant optioneering and transport modelling has already been completed, the project team are carrying out further investigations into the traffic movements in the area, to help identify solutions to the egress of traffic from Parkway on to the A4155 Little Marlow Road. It is acknowledged that should this additional work identify a solution to this egress issue, it will be used to help secure further funding. It should be recognised that without an agreed solution it is not possible to confirm costings, however any alterations, such as installing traffic signals at the Parkway/A4155 Little Marlow Road junction, are expected to be significantly higher than the figure quoted by Councillor Watson. Any additional work within the vicinity of the Westhorpe junction will be carried out as a subsequent phase of work and should not delay the current proposals that are planned to commence on site during the summer 2021 as the funding deadline for a significant part of the funding which comes from Highways England is March 2022.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 The scheme consultation started on 7th January 2019 and closed on 1st February 2019, involving a series of public exhibitions for local residents and businesses to find out about and feedback on scheme proposals. The public engagement was promoted through local media, social media and the Globe Park business network.

7.2 In total there were 303 responses to the consultation; the majority of which were in favour of the scheme. The results breakdown as follows:

Q1: Do you support the introduction of traffic signals on the Westhorpe Interchange?

For: 45% Against: 34% Don't know/did not say: 21%

Q2: Do you support the introduction of a new slip road to access Parkway?

For: 66% Against: 12% Don't know/did not say: 22%

Q3: Do you support a new access on the A4155 to Marlow International?

For: 36% Against: 30% Don't know/did not say: 34%

7.3 The consultation demonstrated that the scheme has a high level of public support for the segregated slip road and signalisation. When investigated further, the option of the new access through Marlow International was found to be unviable, as Marlow International withdrew its support for this measure. It was therefore removed from the scope for this scheme.

7.4 The critical scheme location as primary access to Marlow and Globe Business Park, it will be important to keep businesses and residents updated on scheme progress – and to mitigate the potential for congestion and delays during construction. A communications plan will be developed to ensure that information and e-bulletins are shared in a timely fashion, the project's website will be regularly updated with relevant information and activities concerning the project as well as the use of social media, press releases and on-site variable message signs.

7.5 Liaison with Highways England as funder and scheme approver as well as with Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, has been a priority and will continue throughout the implementation of this scheme.

7.6 All local Members were notified of the consultation and invited to respond.

7.7 Future communication with key stakeholders will involve:

- The use of a dedicated project website.
- Press releases to announce the start and end of construction.
- Use of variable message signs (VMS) and advanced notice signs in the local area, prior to and during the construction phase.
- Use of regular project bulletins throughout the construction phase, to share traffic management and programme information.

8. Next steps and review

8.1 Subject to agreement, works will continue with supply partners Balfour Beatty, to complete construction of the scheme by February 2022 - in accordance with the grant funding requirements

8.2 The project milestones are shown below:

Activity	Timescale
Vegetation Clearance	Completed February 2021
Detailed Design	Completed February 2021
Technical approval of design by Buckinghamshire Council and Highways England	February to May 2021
Construction mobilisation (including sub-contract tendering)	May to July 2021
Construction phase	July 2021 to February 2022

9. Background papers

9.1 Appendix A: Report to Strategic Transport and Infrastructure Board (STIB) December 2019 [confidential]

Appendix B: Strategic Transport and Infrastructure Board (STIB) Minutes December 2019 [confidential]

Appendix C: Shadow Executive Report February 2020

Appendix D: Shadow Executive Decision Notice Feb 2020 (Westhorpe 14a)

Appendix E: General Arrangement Plan for New Segregated Left Turn Lane

Appendix F: General Arrangement Plan for Southbound Exit Slip Lane

Appendix G: Draft Land Transfer Plan

Appendix H: Draft Future Control Plan

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk